

Two Masters



Visits with Robert Lax in Greece (1984 & 1985)

by John Levy

Cid Corman and ORIGIN: A Personal Account

by David Miller

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Cid Corman and ORIGIN: A Personal Account
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ISBN: 978-1-365-91952-7

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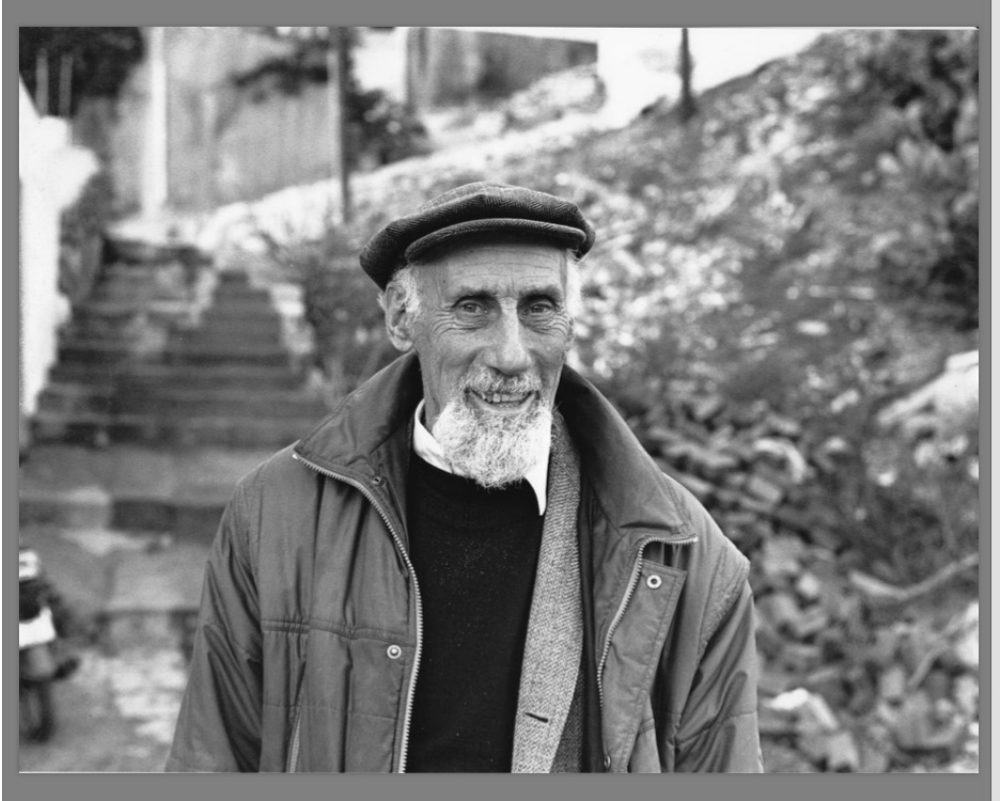
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Visits with Robert Lax in
Greece
(1984 & 1985)

for John Martone

John Levy



Introduction

The first time my wife Leslie Buchanan and I met Robert Lax ("Bob") was in Athens. Bob was living on Patmos, a Greek island, and was visiting Athens and staying at a small hotel. Leslie and I had been living in a Greek village, Meligalas, since mid-August 1983. The next year we visited Bob on Patmos.

The following notes from my journal have been slightly revised.

Part I

September 24, 1984 (Athens)

Bob said when he was living on the Greek island Kalymnos he began recording his dreams for months, writing them down as if they included stage directions: noting light, position of characters, etc. When he read over a few months of them he realized how often he was either in a bus during the dreams or running for a bus. In one dream he was in the middle of a forest on a stopped bus and realized he was the oldest person on the bus.

A little while after he'd kept this dream journal he was contacted by a friend to see if he'd like to be in a travel film being made about Greece. He needed the money and said yes. It turned out the film was all about characters on a bus, was called "Once Upon a Bus," and many of the scenes he'd dreamed were in the film -- including the bus stopping in the middle of a forest and Bob being the oldest person on the bus.

He also told a story about something that had happened earlier. He had known a Hindu monk, Mahanambrata Brahmachari ("MB"), who meditated. He said MB was a very fine and inspiring person and Bob decided to write a book about him. MB eventually went back to India, but not before Bob had both told him about the book (MB was interested in it and agreed/consented to Bob writing about him) and had begun writing some of it.

One night, after MB had returned to India, Bob dreamed that he saw him sitting under a tree that had leaves that "dripped with sunlight" and MB was smiling at Bob. Bob woke and decided he'd better work on the book again. A little later he received a letter from MB asking how Bob was coming along with the book and MB put book in quotation marks. Then MB added, "Or did

I say something to you about it in a dream?"

Bob says that, unlike for us Westerners, Greeks take it for granted that dreams will tell them things. "We're the ones who are disoriented," Bob said. He said people on Kalymnos sometimes dreamed of buried treasure on the island, would wake and go to that spot, dig and find treasure.

Bob showed us some of his books, including *fables* (Pendo, 1983) and *episodes* (Pendo, 1983). He told us that a few of the fables were based on actual conversations and that as soon as the person left he'd "scribble them down."

I said one of my favorite pieces in *episodes* is the one about the broad-faced smiling person whose assistant is always thin and worried. Bob said that's the kind of thing he loves to find in a novel, but can't make himself plow through a novel to find.

In response to a comment of mine on one of his poems, Bob said, "I don't think any of them came from the desire to write a poem. They came from stumbling down the street talking to myself."

Bob said he thinks the important thing in poetry is to say something that you need to say, not something to the world, but simply something you wanted to say. And also that you, as a poet, then have the responsibility of trying to see that those things you say aren't blown away in the wind.

He said that with all of his books that have been published he has never known how the books would be designed and that each time he has been surprised and pleased.

Also, he said he doesn't edit the sequence or selection of his own books. Friends have done that and he has been happily surprised by the selections and the sequences. I commented that one advantage of this approach is that it would prevent a writer from being overly self-critical. He said that a long time ago he had made a rule that he wouldn't pick on himself.

I asked Bob about his friendship with Ad Reinhardt. Bob was at the same high school as Reinhardt, was a freshman when Reinhardt was a senior and Reinhardt was his hero ("the best artist at the high school!"). And then, at Columbia University, Bob was there when Reinhardt was and Thomas Merton was there too. And a group of them worked together on the campus humor

magazine, Jester, and became very close.

Bob said that when Reinhardt began doing his black paintings people finally started taking Reinhardt more seriously as an artist, but that Bob had taken Reinhardt seriously as an artist ever since high school. And that if you talked to Reinhardt you inevitably talked about painting.

Bob said Reinhardt was one of the most dedicated artists he had ever met. If Reinhardt went to a new city he'd beeline for the museums and if he wasn't going to a city with museums then he'd probably be going to a place like Angkor Wat.

Bob would accompany Reinhardt on visits to other painters, including Robert Motherwell, whom Bob liked very much. Bob says Motherwell was just like his paintings, both physically and also the way he acted, and that he was a very nice guy.

Bob also went to the group meetings the New York painters held. He said he liked the meetings the most at first, before any of the painters were really selling: they'd talk about where you could get paint for a good price, where to buy cheap canvas, etc. Only later did they begin talking theory.

He met de Kooning almost right after de Kooning reached America because Dave Budd, a friend of Bob's who was having de Kooning over for dinner, invited Bob because Dave knew de Kooning had an interest in circuses and that Bob did too.

I asked Bob if he had ever met Rothko. He said he had met him at some parties and Rothko had always struck him "as a successful dentist." A nice guy, etc., but Bob simply couldn't imagine him at work in his studio. He said he liked Rothko's work.

He also said he liked Franz Kline's work very much, but never met Kline.

At one time Reinhardt taught Bob how to paint. Bob was a little afraid of how complicated it would be, with mixing colors, etc. Bob said that he did learn how to paint, but then quickly abandoned it, finding it too complicated a process to enjoy. He had, though, always given his drawings to Reinhardt and said that Reinhardt had been receptive to them.

One time Bob and Reinhardt went to visit Merton at Merton's seminary. The three of them sat out in a field and Bob listened to Reinhardt and Merton talk about religious art. Bob said it was a great conversation and he mostly just listened.

Bob said two of his favorite books by Merton are *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* and Merton's translation *The Way of Chuang Tzu*.

He talked about *A Catch of Anti-Letters*, published by Sheed, Andrews and McMeel in 1978. It is a collection of letters exchanged between Bob and Merton. He said the book is almost impossible to find now. He never understood what happened to it -- a term in his contract stated that if the publisher ever remaindered the book they'd let him know in advance so he could buy as many as he wanted, but they never let him know if they remaindered it. He wrote the publishers, at one point, wanting to order some and they said it was out of print. Because they had kept sending him sales reports of virtually zero sales, and since they never told him if they remaindered it, he couldn't figure out where all the copies went.

Bob said he has a good situation with his house on Patmos. He has half a house and his landlord has the other half and whenever Bob needs anything the landlord is right there to help. Otherwise, the landlord is nowhere to be seen. "Perfect," Bob said. He has a fine view of the harbor. And wood floors, which keep the place fairly warm in the winter.

Unfortunately, the officials on Patmos regard Bob suspiciously, not understanding why anyone would want to live on a Greek island, especially an American who could live in what the officials regard as the wealthy, luxurious country of America. And the officials find it doubly fishy because Patmos is in a border area. The officials imagine that Bob is connected to the CIA or some other such organization. Bob said the people he knows on the island don't think that. And the problem is that the officials change frequently: Bob never gets to know them well, or them him, thus Bob is continually regarded as a suspicious stranger, to be watched and distrusted. And this prevents him from feeling truly at home on Patmos so he doesn't consider it a permanent home.

We told Bob a little about our rented house in Meligalas and mentioned a couple of cats who would visit that we'd feed. Bob said he had a cat

named Catsby on Patmos.

He said that when he was interviewed by William Packard, of *The New York Quarterly*, he was asked about being a writer "in exile," but that he doesn't feel that he is in exile and thinks that is an old-fashioned notion anyway. Bob says no one is in exile today unless they go someplace like the North Pole.

A friend of Bob's recently told him that Aristotle had ruined western civilization by making everything seem based on reason and logic. "When obviously it is not," Bob added. And it would have been much better if Heraclitus had been the one who people based civilization upon, Bob's friend said. Bob agreed.

He mentioned an afternoon he had spent with Randall Jarrell and Robert Lowell, during which Bob had praised *Finnegans Wake*. Jarrell and Lowell had tried to convince Bob that William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* was a superior, more important book. (It sounded like this was when both Jarrell and Lowell were fairly young.) Bob said something that implied that none of the three came away very satisfied with the afternoon.

He said he loves to read Lao Tzu and never tires of it, it always seems new to him. He said another book he loves is Mircea Eliade's *Patterns of Religious Experience*.

I asked Bob about his experiences with circuses. He said he had been working on *The New Yorker* and that a friend on the staff of the magazine had said he was going to interview some of the Cristiani family, who ran a circus, for the magazine's "Talk of the Town" and the friend asked Bob if he would like to come along. So Bob went and said he was amazed by the Cristianis, loved them, and began hanging around with them. He went to see them rehearse and later flew up to Canada to be with the Cristiani family circus when they performed there. The family was from Italy and Bob said their son, 17, was the most "American" in the group and acted as their PR man. Bob told the son that he wanted to write a book about them. The boy looked at Bob seriously and said, "You know, a lot of people have asked us if they could do a book about us, but I think you could do it." Bob was amused, and touched too. (Bob made it clear by the way he told the story that he thought no one else had asked to write a book about them.)

After that, Bob said, he was in love with circuses and hung around one in Europe and then another also in Europe. He said that for one of them he

waited for them, on the field where they were eventually going to set up, for three days. He would help them do things and was especially useful when they were dismantling the show and the cages. He had spent almost all his time with the people in the circus during their stay in town, 10 days, and had told himself he wouldn't travel with them unless they invited him. On the last day, one by one they came to him and said, "You are coming with us, aren't you?" And he said, "Yes, oh yes."

He was especially close to a man who did the electrical set-up and was a truck-driver for the circus, who was like a father figure. This man advised Bob that it would be alright for him to travel with the circus, but that he should eat alone, buying his own food, so the boss wouldn't mind. Bob said that was very good advice and he took it. Also, Bob purposely never got to know the boss very well. He didn't want to feel obligated to write a book about the circus that would appeal to the boss.

Bob said that the circuses were the only place where he felt he was completely accepted.

Part II

July 5th - 12th, 1985 (Patmos)

Friday, July 5th

Leslie and I took a ship from Athens to Patmos. It was supposed to arrive at about 10 p.m. It got in at midnight. Bob was waiting for us with a big smile and hugs. He worried about the big trucks coming off the ship so we were extra-cautious on the dock as we walked the short distance to the street and over to the hotel his friends own, THE REX. He insisted on helping us carry some of our things there. Then he suggested we go have a drink.

We asked if it wasn't too late for him and he said no (though later in the week, discussing his habits, he said he usually gets in bed around 10, reads a little or tries to sleep, but also writes down whatever comes to him that he might want in his journal (by his bed he keeps a chair, with his journal on it and a flashlight and the book he is currently reading, which this week is a book of Chinese philosophy) and usually gets to sleep around midnight).

We went to a bar where the waiter affectionately called Bob "Americanaki." Bob had two scoops of chocolate ice-cream. Mostly we talked about Bob's show in Stuttgart (a retrospective of Bob's writings and drawings at the Neue Staatsgalerie in 1985).

Bob was happy about how many friends came to Stuttgart for the show and said both the show, and his reading, went very well.

I had sent Bob a book of Charles Reznikoff's poetry some time before the visit. Bob talked enthusiastically about Reznikoff's poetry. He said he especially liked the poem about visiting a man in a grocery store and asking about the man's son, who had left "for the front," and later returning to the man's store and asking about the son again (a poem which is also one of my favorites). [This poem is in *By the Well of Living and Seeing*, Part II, Section 28.]

Comments and Anecdotes from the Week

Bob said the people at the Patmos post office are happy to see him when he has a lot of mail and cross with him when he has none. He thought it was probably the same for us in the village where we'd been living. We told him that our situation is different. Our mail is delivered to our little rented house and if we don't have any mail the mailman simply doesn't come.

I had brought Elias Canetti's book about Kafka's letters to Felice and lent it to Bob. After he had read some of it, Bob said he likes Kafka, but hasn't read that much of him. And that he likes Kafka's comment that "night is never night enough for a writer" and totally agrees.

I looked through some of the poetry magazines Bob had out on his couch (including *The Hudson Review*). Bob said that he likes to read dance criticism and art criticism and that the vocabulary in those articles startles him and is fun.

Bob said he had sent a chunk of his journal to Bernhard Moosbrugger, his publisher (Moosbrugger and Gladys Weigner started a publishing company, Pendo Verlag, in Zurich) and Moosbrugger said he would publish it as a book and call it *Journal A*. Bob said he wasn't sure what was in it.

We began talking about writing in general. Bob first compared writing to tight-rope walking, talking about how much practice it takes and how you start slowly and later can run -- and how all the time you have each foot landing on the wire. Then he said that everyone has a stream inside him and that writing is like bringing fish out of that stream... And that anyone who takes

your writing seriously looks to see how many fish you brought up today... And that it is necessary to divorce oneself from the history of literature. Bob commented that artists had to divorce themselves from art history. As for the idea of the inner stream, he said many art critics only want to talk about art as art, not about what it tells us about that inner stream. He said that in his opinion poetry is close to introspective psychology.

He said that writing is a gift and you receive it with gratitude -- and the writer's job is to write as much as possible and not worry about what happens to the writing and what other people think. Just send it out. If it is taken, then it was meant to be -- you only have a limited amount of energy and you can't waste it worrying about what people say or worrying about placing your poetry.

Bob commented that during circus rehearsals, when you give criticism, it's always gentle and helpful. When talking to a tightrope walker you don't say to someone up on the wire, "You're a real flop!" You say something like, "Move a little to the left." Criticism should be gentle.

Bob said he remembers James Joyce's statement to think of every sentence as if it were in a telegram at a dollar a word. Cut all unnecessary words. If a word's necessary it isn't weak.

Bob said everyone needs a goal in life. He said the Dalai Lama sees the goal as having a warm heart. And that the Dalai Lama says that all a person can do is try, and if you fail well then you fail, but you try again, always try again, and have no regrets.

Over dinner one night Bob talked for a while about a two-year period he spent in Hollywood. A friend of his was a director and he worked with the friend. He didn't like Hollywood. "The palm trees looked like they didn't know where their next drink was coming from," he said. Everything seemed fake.

Bob said he felt so happy to return to New York he felt like kissing the streets.

Bob said he is happy with his house in Patmos and all the other houses he has lived in in Greece are like cousins to it -- they've all been similar.

With regard to having a goal, Bob said the question "Who am I?" is not as important as "What am I doing?" And that having a goal helps to focus thoughts on what to do.

In talking about writers, Bob said any writer out of the university world — that is, who was not teaching English lit. or creative writing — has a big advantage. And if a writer is in a university, it would be better to teach something like Latin, and keep his soul untouched.

When Bob was talking about a place where he had lived, if he liked the place he invariably mentioned in the same sentence or the following sentence that it had been a good place for him to write. So when he talked about Lesbos, Kalymnos, the Canary Islands, and a place in Spain, each of which he liked, he'd say something like, "I was happy there and did a lot of writing."

Bob said he likes Patmos, but doesn't feel attached to it the way he feels so attached to Kalymnos, a place that was like a discovery for him. He also said he felt an attachment for Marseille and that while he liked Paris he never felt an attachment to it the way he had to Marseille.

At breakfast we were talking about villagers and gossip. Bob said, about the villagers: "People aren't reading, but they're always reading each other as if they were novels."

In Marseille Bob said he had a little postcard on his wall, by Jean Fouquet, of St. John on a little rock in the ocean, writing, and he said he thought his idea to visit Patmos dated from then. And that from the card, Bob said smiling, Patmos looked like a good place to write.

Bob said that he used to think he had to have something to write about, but now just thinks writing itself is the thing, to write as much as possible.

Talking about Charles Reznikoff's poems, he said that Reznikoff uses a tone that you'd use only among family -- talking to fellow Jews -- as compared, say, to Philip Roth or Saul Bellow, who are thinking of an audience beyond Jews. He said Reznikoff is like an uncle. And that Reznikoff speaks of a particular America, his own, the one Reznikoff lived in and that it is different from, say, William Carlos Williams's America or Robert Lowell's. Bob also said that there is nothing cute in Reznikoff, no cuteness.

Bob said that art is a process of getting people ready for something else, so that they appreciate the cosmic situation they're in. . . And that the best thing

that could happen as a result of art would be that everyone would gasp when they see a butterfly.

He said that recently in art there has been a cult of the personality of the artist, but that it is time for that to be over and that everyone (artists, poets) should just do their work like scientists, work -- and be a part of a working community, getting strength from a tradition and contributing to that tradition. And he said that when you read about scientists's lives you don't get the same stories of depressions and ego problems that you get when you read about artists' lives and he thinks it's because artists have been too concerned with questions of ego instead of simply the work and being able to do the work and being committed to doing it steadily.

Bob said that now he has had a stronger feeling of silence than he used to have and that he doesn't begin to write until it is the silence speaking. He said silence is the natural state of man and also gives a standard by which to judge. I asked if he meant by which to judge one's own writing or writing by others. He said, "Both. And everything."

Noticing that I had brought a Wordsworth book with me, he said he likes Wordsworth and always meant to read more of him. And that he really likes Coleridge, especially Coleridge's prose.

When discussing books, I mentioned to Bob that I'd recently read *War and Peace*. He commented, "You read it for both of us."

While talking about the problems in America now he said that people should know their roots, but usually don't. And that, in America, that means studying Emerson, Jefferson, and Whitman, and that understanding them should perhaps come before turning to Zen or some other approach. He clarified that he didn't mean only Emerson, Jefferson, and Whitman, but believes especially those three have a lot to offer.

Bob mentioned that Howard Gold said that Edward Rice's book on Thomas Merton, *The Man in a Sycamore Tree*, is one long poem. Bob said that when he heard that comment he understood the book better. He added that it wasn't that he hadn't understood what Rice was saying in the book, but that the way Rice said it now seemed more clearly defined. Bob also praised the way Rice leads into Merton quotes, saying that Rice understands Merton so well and has so much in common with him that what Rice says flows into what

Merton says.

Looking through Bob's journal pages at his home I saw "jhs" at the top of many of the pages and asked what it meant. "Thomas Merton did that," he answered, "it's a dedication. To Jesus Holy Savior." He said he often -- though not always -- put that at the top of the page.

One night, near midnight, in a restaurant in Skala, there was a table of men who seemed to have just come in off a fishing boat or a couple of boats. They were eating, drinking, loud, happy. The waiter also livened up around them. Bob and I were talking about Greece and I commented on how the elections in our area had been like one big party, with people driving around in cars waving flags, honking horns, etc. Bob said everything is a party in Greece.

Talking about his time in Marseille, Bob said the time there was so good that he'd be happy if he could remember every minute of it. He said the police never bothered him, as a foreigner, for papers (and his papers weren't quite in order, he noted) unless he was walking down the street happily -- and then they'd invariably stop him.

He said there is a joke they tell on Kalymnos and probably elsewhere in Greece. A fisherman takes a priest out in his boat and once they are at sea the priest falls out because the ocean has gotten rough. The fisherman leans over, stretches out his hand to the priest who is flailing and seems about to go under, and says, "Give me your hand." The priest keeps struggling and the fisherman thinks the priest didn't hear him so says, louder, "Give me your hand." The priest seems about to drown yet acts as if he can't hear the fisherman. "Take my hand," the fisherman says, and suddenly the priest grabs his hand.

I asked Bob if he lost his interest in Judaism and Bob said he never did. He said he just followed it and that Christianity seemed a continuation from the Old Testament to the New. I asked if he ever wanted to be a monk and he replied, "Yes, when I was seven years old." He wanted to be a Franciscan monk. But, he added, he hasn't wanted to be a monk since then and especially not now. He said maybe he could be a hermit, then paused and said he couldn't even do that, he would have to be a hermit with five assistants.

He asked if we had heard the one about the monk carrying a woman over the river. Neither of us had. Two monks were traveling out in the country and came upon a woman standing by a river, unable to cross. One asked if she

needed help and she said yes. So he picked her up, carried her across, and then set her down. The two monks then proceeded on their way. About an hour later one monk said to the other, who had carried the woman, "I think that was an act against chastity, picking up that woman like that." The other monk replied, "I put her down an hour ago, but you're still carrying her."

On the beach, as Bob was standing in the water, with his mask on and his snorkel in his mouth, Bob crossed himself before he began to swim.

Saturday, July 6th

We were finishing breakfast at the hotel, around 9:30, when we saw Bob pass by in the high window, set so high that we only saw his head. He didn't glance in as he passed. He returned 10 minutes later and joined us. He spoke a little to the hotel owner, as he had the night before, and also with all the islanders who know him, as most do in Skala. There is an affection and familiarity between Bob and the islanders. Bob is friendly and always ready to laugh, often smiling and a little shy although he'd usually be the one to say hello first when he passed someone he knew and it was never an automatic or thoughtless hello, but a directed warm greeting so the response was also genuine.

After we left the hotel we went to a small grocery store, around the corner and down two blocks. The grocer was happy to see Bob. Bob explained that Leslie and I are friends who are visiting from America. There were a lot of smiles. Then we went to the liquor store, which is run by one of Bob's best friends on Patmos, a man about 65. It is a well-stocked, nice place. (Bob later told me that it was this man who had heard of the place to rent and told Bob that he knew where he could live; I think this was when Bob had had to leave Kalymnos.)

Bob wanted to know what we might want to drink, but we said we aren't big drinkers. He bought a six-pack of beer. (On Thursday evening, after Bob offered us a drink and we said, "Maybe later," Bob joked that we were different from most of his guests who would often say "That calls for a drink!" and who would jump up whenever a drink was mentioned.)

Then we walked to his place, which is only about a five-minute walk from lower Skala (where the stores and restaurants are). It is on a hill with a great view of the nearby harbor below. He occupies one half of a house. In his front door there is a key in the lock. It seems he always leaves the key there.

The front door opens to a hallway and to the left is the kitchen. Off the kitchen is the small bathroom, which has a toilet and sink, but no bath or shower. In the kitchen there is a card table covered with supplies and utensils. Behind the kitchen door are boxes full of large opened envelopes. On the kitchen wall is a list, in Greek, of health foods, which Bob said his friend Moschos had sent him. There is no refrigerator.

On the kitchen table is a bottle of White Horse Scotch next to the wall and a bottle of ouzo, bags of lentils, coffee, salt, an opened cellophane bag of raisins, an unopened carton of orange juice, a drinking glass with a few spoons, forks, and knives in it, a half loaf of bread, a coffee substitute, etc.

The metal sink is divided into two parts. During the week there would usually be a small stack of dishes and plates in the sink. The kitchen was never a mess, but obviously was not the kitchen of a compulsively tidy person.

Bob has very few dishes, bowls, cups, or pieces of silverware. One package of paper napkins. An opened bottle of mineral water. Bob said that the people on the island drink bottled water because they don't trust the water they get from the boats.

The bathroom has a pail by the toilet. Bob explained later that Patmos is very low on water and the boat with water was late and so to flush the toilet you put water in the pail, from the kitchen sink, and carry it in. (The next day the boat with water arrived, but it turned out I hadn't understood Bob well and actually he always flushes the toilet by using a pail of water because the toilet is broken.) (Later in the week I asked Bob what he does for baths or showers. He said he sponges himself.) On the small shelf below the mirror in the bathroom is a shaving brush, the old-fashioned kind with what looks like real hair.

The hallway had a large framed sepia portrait of a man around 35. The photo seemed at least 50 years old. Bob said that the photo had come with the place. The main room has a fairly high ceiling, with beams, and a wooden floor that is at a slant (which is not noticeable until you lie down on the floor and then it is quite apparent). A work table is next to the wall on the right and is covered with books, papers, letters, and postcards. A painting of a saint (about

a foot high) leans against the wall; he said a friend on Kalymnos had given it to him. The arrangement of all the things on the desk was very casual rather than in neat stacks and/or orderly rows.

Before we reached the house Bob had said we should be ready for "total chaos," but everything was fairly orderly. I commented on this and Bob said the landlady had recently cleaned and that's why it wasn't chaotic.

Taped to his bedroom wall were many photos and drawings and a few postcards. Above his work table were two small photos of Merton, both of which had been cut out of publications, and one of them was by Ralph Eugene Meatyard (it had a photo credit). Neither of the Merton photos were much bigger than a matchbook, but they were placed about in the middle -- two feet above the desk -- so they were central and prominent. Also, Merton was the only person whom Bob had two photos of on the wall.

Near the Merton photo was a large xeroxed photo of a young Dalai Lama with a big smile and in the photo, behind Dalai Lama, was a shimmering pattern of light and dark as if it were a tree with big leaves out of focus. Then there was a full page child's drawing of a man with a beard. The man looked intense and intelligent and written above the man was Daddy. Bob said that this was a portrait of C. K. Williams by Williams's son. There was also a color photo of a lovely young woman sitting on a bench in winter, smiling at the camera, with snow on the ground. Bob said that he had met her on Patmos and at that time in her life she had felt very lost, but since then she joined a religious group (I think Bob said which group, but I forgot) and has been very happy.

There was a color photo of Edward Rice, in a thick down jacket, standing in a field and looking towards the camera in a friendly, relaxed way. There was also a picture of a dog that looked like it was drawn by a child. The dog was wearing a baseball cap.

On the other wall (the wall on the bed's side of the room) there was a black-and-white portrait of a family. Bob said that this is the man, with his family, who had gotten Bob involved with the Space conferences in Europe, which Bob now attends officially as the photographer. There was also a small, black-and-white passport-size photo of Howard Gold. Gold looks very serious, almost stern, and has a graying beard.

Bob explained that he puts up photos, usually when he receives them, and after a while they fall down and then he usually puts up new ones. (While we were there Gold's photo fell off the wall and so did the portrait of the family.) Bob showed us a color photo of David Miller and said it had recently fallen off the wall. David looks happy, standing in a park in front of a tree.

One of the art postcards taped up is Rouault's "Holy Face."

I noticed a varnished stone on the desk, tan with dark veins, shaped like a slightly elongated egg and about the size of a fist. I picked it up to look at it and said something about how nice it was. Bob told me to take it. He said his friend Arne had given it to him. I tried to refuse, both because the stone was a gift from a friend and also because Leslie and I have been living in Greece for two years and are returning to Arizona soon and have a lot to ship back. Bob insisted that I take it, saying he had a lot more of them and that they come from Lambi, a special beach on Patmos. And then he went into the other room and came back with a plastic bag with about 40 more stones from Lambi and said we should take as many as we wanted.

Leslie and I sat on the couch, Bob sat on his bed, and we talked for a while. I looked through the magazines on the couch and Bob said some of them had been given to him (gift subscriptions). He showed me an issue of *Pembroke Magazine* with some of his poems in it. He later commented that he had sent a batch of poems to someone associated with the magazine who had often asked him to send poems so finally he sent them a group of pieces thinking they could choose from among them -- they published them all.

I saw the magazine *Parabola*, an issue on "Wholeness," and remarked on it. Bob said something like, "Oh, you're *Parabola* people too?" and laughed. I said I had first seen it at a painter friend's house. Bob said he likes it, though he hadn't ever seen it before this issue. I think he said he got the issue from Edward Rice, who had an article in it about a biography of Merton.

A bedspread was nailed to the wall next to Bob's bed. It had big white snowflake shapes on a brown background and was almost psychedelic. I asked Bob about it. He said the landlady had nailed it up and he doesn't like to look at it, but felt awkward about taking it down.

There was a knock on the door and Bob disappeared for a minute. He came back and said it was the landlady, who knew he had guests so had brought

some extra beans (cooked in oil, typical Greek style). We ate the beans and after talking some more Bob suggested we go to a beach.

We walked back down to Skala. Leslie and I got our bathing suits from the hotel. As we walked towards the beach, Bob saw many people to greet. Then we passed boats, some on the shore and some near the shore. One man with a boy was repainting a boat. Bob said that the man was a friend of his and would perhaps join us on the beach later. That was the first time we saw Damianos and it wasn't until a little later that I found out that he is a very close friend of Bob's. Damianos was wearing a black wrap-around back brace.

Bob swims with a mask and snorkel. And he and Damianos always change into a different bathing suit to swim then get out of it immediately when they leave the water. Bob explained (on another day) that some people believe that if you stay in a wet bathing suit after you go swimming you will get arthritis.

Damianos went out from shore snorkeling and came back with a black sea urchin. He asked if Bob wanted to eat it, or if either of us did, and we all said no. Later, Damianos threw it back into the sea. Bob said that Damianos often found octopuses.

We had lunch on a piece of white rough canvas, like a tarp, that Bob had brought along. Tomatoes, canned sardines, bread, cheese, and watermelon. Damianos urged Bob to eat more and also wanted Leslie and I to eat more too.

Damianos left first. Then the three of us walked back to the hotel together. Bob said he'd come over later, for dinner. He returned to the hotel around 7:15.

We walked to a restaurant a bit back from the waterfront that had a big plane tree in front of it with tables beneath the tree. Bob mentioned (after the meal) that the restaurant owner was always nice enough and that the owner's wife was very nice to him and would put something extra on his plate when her husband's back was turned.

While we ate we talked about Bob's days in Hollywood. And then we talked about Charles Reznikoff and I described Reznikoff's novel, *The Manner Music*, about Reznikoff's time in Hollywood. I mentioned how the novel portrays the relationship between the protagonist and his wife. Then the three of us talked about how people viewed what it meant to be in a relationship back then (about 40-50 years ago) compared to how people think of relationships now.

Bob said that 40-50 years ago people weren't as introspective as they are now; back then they often seemed to assume that if they found the right person then they'd have a good marriage. But often they would have problems after they got married and found out how much they had to deal with. Whereas, Bob said, today it is very different and young people think they have to get their own lives together (I believe he did use this phrase, "get their own lives together") first, before they got into a marriage. People are much more concerned now, he said, with getting to know themselves.

After dinner we walked up the hill toward the Sacred Cave, but Leslie and I noticed Bob was having a little difficulty and seemed tired. So although he suggested we continue up the hill, we said we'd rather go back down. We walked down, past the restaurant where we'd eaten, and along a small road. We passed a little chapel that I wanted to look into so we all went in for a minute.

Bob told a story about when he was living on Kalymnos. A young actor who Bob said was fairly well-known (I think he said she was a Greek actor) had come to visit him. They were walking around a village happily one night, greeting people, and Bob heard someone say in Greek, as they walked away, "He's a very nice guy, but his daughter's a knock-out!"

Bob talked about places he'd lived and how he felt detached from Patmos, but had felt very attached to Kalymnos. It was twilight and there was a pink edge to the dark blue sky. The little road we were on was deserted except for us. The walls we passed were mostly white and there were a few small gardens in the yards and some larger enclosed fields. We walked slowly, looking around as we talked.

We went down to the waterfront and had a drink in the same place where we'd had a drink the night before. Then we went back to Bob's house.

On the steps leading up to Bob's house we happened into Bob's landlady, her daughter, and a man (who Leslie and I later found out was the landlady's lawyer). The landlady greeted Bob with a big anxious smile, the daughter acknowledged us, and the man ignored us. The three of them went ahead of us and entered the landlady's house. Then we walked up the steps.

There was a cat on his porch. It didn't have a nose and half of its face looked like an open red sore. Bob said his neighbors were afraid of the cat because it had some kind of disease and they thought it would make their own

cats sick. Bob said the cat waits on his porch and that he always feeds it. His own cat, Catsy, that he had mentioned when we saw him in Athens, had left while Bob was in Stuttgart and hasn't returned.

After we had settled down and begun to talk in the house, Bob told us that he was going to buy the half of the house where he was living from the landlady on Monday. He was worried that the deal could go wrong in a number of ways and wanted to discuss his concerns. It was the first and only time Bob seemed downcast and anxious on our visit.

Bob said the landlady's lawyer made him nervous. He said that when we saw the lawyer with the landlady tonight the lawyer acted as if Bob weren't there at all and that disturbed Bob, as did the landlady's nervous smile.

In a meeting with the lawyer and the landlady a price for half of the house had been proposed. Prices for houses in Skala were high now and Bob knew the proposed price was a good deal. Plus, Bob knew a doctor in Skala also wanted to buy the half of the house where Bob had been living.

In a later meeting, with just the landlady, Bob had bargained the landlady down to a substantially better price. But Bob was afraid the lawyer would insist on the higher price anyway and that the lawyer would say Bob's agreement with the landlady wasn't binding.

After talking for at least an hour, Bob cheered up. He had started the conversation sitting on his bed, hunched over, but as we talked about the various resolutions to problems his spirits improved. By the end of the discussion, Bob said he felt good about being able to handle whatever situation would come up on Monday, although he said several times we should come with him on Monday for the negotiations and that he needed us there.

We agreed to meet tomorrow morning after breakfast and walk up to the Sacred Cave.

Sunday, July 7th

Bob met us at the hotel. We told him we had already eaten breakfast. He mentioned he hadn't had any breakfast, but didn't want one. So we began walking up to the Sacred Cave.

We were still near the hotel when Bob complained of heart pain and said we should walk ahead and he'd catch up to us. He made it clear he was in pain and wanted to be left alone. So we walked on, looking back occasionally. He stayed in one place. We had gotten about 7-8 blocks up the road and could see him begin to walk towards us slowly so we waited under the shadows of trees near a schoolyard.

Leslie and I had been talking about suggesting that he go back to his place and "take the day off" -- just rest and perhaps, if he wanted, we could get together for dinner. When he reached us he said the pain was like a stitch in the side and had hurt all the way as he walked up to meet us. He said he had had pains like that in Switzerland once when he hadn't eaten breakfast.

We made our suggestion he "take the day off." He said he would prefer to go with us up to the Sacred Cave. We decided to take a taxi.

Bob flagged down a taxi, driven by a man in his mid- or late 60s. Bob sat in the front. He and the driver laughed a lot. Afterwards, Bob said that they were talking about an old joke on Patmos concerning Bob's niece. His niece, who is very beautiful, had visited a while back and all the young men of the village were interested in her. The joke was that if Bob shut the door to his place then the men would come in through the windows. Bob said he was the straight man, feeding the driver the lines, because the whole joke has gotten to be such a routine among friends of Bob's.

At the Sacred Cave there is a sign on the wall that says "SAGRED GAVE." A Sunday service was in progress and we moved away from a group of people over to a place above the cave, where we were by ourselves.

There was a view out over the hills and small valleys to the bay. We watched birds gliding over the hills and fields below us. Bob said the birds fly more peacefully on Patmos than they do on Kalymnos: less flapping, more gliding. Leslie said it was probably the different wind currents on the hills and Bob agreed.

We talked about the pain Bob had experienced earlier. Bob said that when he had felt the pains in Switzerland he had gone to see a cardiologist and the cardiologist had told him there was nothing wrong with him.

Then we went into the Sacred Cave, which was packed. It seemed to primarily be a crowd of Patmians, with some tourists. A chorus was singing. We lasted a few minutes. The candles were all lit, incense was burning, it was hot and stuffy. On our way out Bob showed us the cell where St. John's disciple had stayed; Bob couldn't remember the disciple's name, which Leslie and I later found in a book (his name was Prochorus). Bob asked some villagers what the disciple's name was and they couldn't remember either.

Bob felt better so we walked back down to the main square in Skala. In a restaurant Bob and I had yogurt and Leslie had coffee. Then we walked up to Bob's house and listened to a tape of him reading from his notebooks. It was wonderful and Bob stopped it and asked if we had had enough, but we asked for more and Bob happily started it back up. We left after the tape was over because Bob was expecting another friend, Tom Stone, at 11:00. (Leslie and I had met Tom earlier, at the hotel.) Bob thought that Tom would visit for about an hour and so we agreed to meet Bob at our hotel for lunch. Our plan was that if Tom's visit lasted longer then Leslie and I should go to the restaurant ourselves and Bob would come down when he could. The restaurant is on the way to the hotel so Bob said he'd look into the restaurant on his way down to meet us and if we weren't there he'd go to the hotel to get us.

We waited in the hotel until about 3:00 and went to the agreed-upon restaurant. I sat facing the window to the little street, but Bob didn't pass by. We ate lunch and left. Then we saw Bob walking towards us. We exchanged

waves. Bob said the visit with Tom had lasted much longer than he'd thought it would and he hadn't eaten yet. So we went back into the restaurant, to the same table, which hadn't been completely cleared. Bob mentioned that he had been to the hotel looking for us, but had forgotten the plan to walk by the restaurant first and he'd taken a different route to the hotel.

Talking about how many people walk through museums barely looking at most of the art, I mentioned Degas's statement that most people don't stand in front of a painting for as long as it takes to peel an orange. Bob said the people in the Stuttgart Museum walked through as if it were just a different kind of park and the paintings were trees one passed but didn't bother to look at.

After Bob ate we all decided to go take naps and then join back up for dinner. The plan was that Bob would meet us and Tom for dinner at a different restaurant close to our hotel, a restaurant facing the dock, which was convenient for Tom since he was leaving on the ferry that evening.

We met with Bob later, but Tom didn't arrive. After quite a while the three of us ended up visiting the restaurant's kitchen to choose what to eat. We kept looking for Tom, but he didn't show up. We didn't want to order dinner without him. After a long time Tom came by, but then left again saying he was looking for a misplaced suitcase. He implied he'd be back soon, but he wasn't. Finally, we ordered appetizers, thinking Tom would appear any minute.

We talked about poets. Bob mentioned that he knew Susan Howe was writing a book on Emily Dickinson. I said a part of it had appeared in a book I had and I told Bob I'd xerox it and send it to him. Bob said he liked Howe's poetry.

At last Tom returned. We ordered dinner. Tom ate quickly because his boat was about to leave. After Tom left, Bob took us to another place for octopus and ouzo. Soon a fisherman, who was a friend of Bob's from Kalymnos whom Bob hadn't seen for a few years, came by and joined us. Bob talked to him in Greek, some of which I could understand. There was a lot of laughing.

We talked about the negotiations with the lawyer and the landlady tomorrow morning. We all agreed it might go better if Bob went alone. Bob was no longer worried and there was the possibility that if Bob brought us it would make the landlady and lawyer apprehensive. We planned to meet at the hotel tomorrow around noon.

Monday, July 8th

Leslie and I began waiting at the hotel for Bob a little before noon. Bob came by at 2:45 and said it took much longer than he had expected and he had bought the house for the low price he'd negotiated with the landlady. He was exhausted. And Leslie didn't feel well, in part because we hadn't eaten yet because we'd been waiting for Bob. We suggested eating lunch, but apparently Bob had already eaten. He said he was going for a swim and invited us, but we needed lunch. We arranged to meet at his house after dinner.

After dinner Leslie wasn't feeling well again. She asked me to go to Bob's alone rather than stay with her at the hotel.

After Bob opened his door he said he knew, by the way I had softly knocked, that I was alone.

He showed me a number of photos he had taken of friends. He asked about a few of them, wanting my opinion on if they were good enough to send to the friends. All of them were wonderful portraits, full of character, well-focused, and somehow respectful in the way that Bob is. Then he showed me a fun series of drawings he'd made.

Including His Mugger in His Prayers

He offered me some White Horse scotch and we both had a little. We were both chatting about friends and family members when he mentioned that he includes "his mugger" in his prayers. I asked when he had been mugged. He seemed a little surprised that I asked and at first just said he'd been mugged once and now prays for the man, but I asked to hear the story.

He said that in 1980 had been visiting his niece in Iowa and was passing through Columbus, Ohio, and was going to continue his trip back to New York by bus. He went to the bus station and the woman behind the counter said there was a bus at three in the morning and then there was "a real morning

bus" at seven. Bob told her he would take the one at three. He found a hotel a block away from the bus station.

Late that night he began walking over to the bus station from his hotel, carrying his suitcase. As he crossed the empty street he saw a black man coming towards him the other way. The man asked him if he had a match. Bob said "No," abruptly, and began to hurry past him and the man laughed. The way he laughed reminded Bob of how his friend Bob Burford laughed and Bob turned back to the man and began to apologize for hurrying away, explaining that he'd been nervous. The man jumped on him and started strangling him. Bob said he didn't resist, but was praying as hard as he could. Suddenly the man wasn't strangling him anymore and, as if talking to his own eight or 10-year-old daughter, said to Bob, "Now just get on over to the bus station."

Bob began walking, holding his suitcase, down the street towards the bus station entrance, but the man said, "Not that way, that way." And the man pointed over to a concrete lot that wasn't a parking lot for a shopping mall or for anything, but just seemed to be a concrete stretch that Bob said was "like a killing floor." It was completely dark. Obeying the man, Bob began to run across the lot and had made it two-thirds of the way and thought to himself "I've made it!" just as the man jumped on him from behind and began strangling him again.

Bob began to pray again and remembered a poem he'd read by Allen Ginsberg in which Ginsberg, while being mugged, said "Om" to himself and so Bob said Om to himself. Bob said it would've been impossible to say anything more than that. And then the phrase, "Goodbye, Columbus" came into Bob's mind (the Philip Roth title) plus a song about 3 a.m. and then he suddenly thought of his sister and his niece, whom he had spoken to on the telephone earlier in the night.

The man had Bob in a headlock, choking him. Bob knew that it could be the end of his life. Then the man said, "You're gonna die, I'm gonna kill ya." Bob realized that if he was killed this way his sister and his niece wouldn't be able to stand it -- and right then the man stopped strangling him and began patting him all over. Only later did Bob realize the man was searching for a wallet and that the man found it.

And then the man released him and stood in front of him. And Bob knew he had to say something to the man, thought of beginning by saying "man," but then remembered someone told him that Blacks don't like to be

called "man" anymore. Bob said it came to him as an inspiration that he must say, "Friend, please don't do this." Bob said it, repeated it, then said it a third time as the man stood there in front of him. Bob wasn't sure if the man heard him, but suddenly the man either gave him back his wallet or threw it on the ground -- Bob couldn't remember which -- having taken out all Bob's cash, which was \$120.00. Then the man left.

Bob said he walked over into the bus station and told a man behind the counter near the door that he had been mugged. The man said something like "What's new?" and wasn't at all sympathetic. But a woman behind another counter was sympathetic.

And the next day, on a bus, he was sitting across from a bus driver on vacation and he told the bus driver the story and that man was a very good listener, very sympathetic, and at a stop bought Bob a coffee and Bob finally felt much better.

Bob said he never felt angry at his mugger and, in fact, felt sorry for him because he was in the kind of situation in which he had to do such things. And Bob said, as he had commented to me before he told me the story, that he includes this man in his prayers.

Bob talked to his niece in Iowa the next night and she asked how his travels had been and he wondered whether he should tell her about the mugging, decided not to, and just said it hadn't been so good. And she said that she asked because she had woken up the night before, a little before 3 a.m., and had felt frightened that something very bad was happening to Bob and so she prayed very hard for him. Bob then told her the story, but asked her not to tell her mother (Bob's sister) because he didn't want her to worry.

I said I found it amazing that he could pray while being attacked by the man and that I thought I would have resisted -- and thus, perhaps, been killed or maybe knocked out. Bob said that he can always pray and that he believes in the phrase "always pray" and that it's the only thing he can imagine always wanting to do. "No other verb would work there," he said. "I certainly don't want to always be thinking! Forget it!" We laughed.

He said that people had told him that he probably would've been okay if he hadn't turned back to apologize for hurrying on. He said he thought that perhaps his pride in his ability to make friends was the fault that led to him

turning back and, therefore, to the mugging. And he said that for a while he wondered if he really was dead and just didn't know it.

He repeated that he prays for his mugger, even though he knows that if they met again maybe the guy would mug him again.

He said a few times, while telling the story, that he hadn't told it to many people and that it helped him to tell it.

I told Bob he should write about it and he said he wouldn't (or maybe he used the word "couldn't," I don't remember). Then he added that I could have the story, if I wanted it, and could write about it if I want to.

After talking about the mugging we realized we were both hungry so we walked down into Skala and had a small meal in the restaurant near the harbor. We began talking about an Egyptian family that had been on the ferry with Leslie and me when we arrived. This family was also staying at THE REX. Bob said he wished he had gotten to know them because he thought the man would have some good stories. Then he said that everyone is mythological, no one is "your average Joe."

Tuesday, July 9th

We met Bob in the morning at the hotel and walked to the waterfront. Damianos was waiting for us. Damianos had suggested to Bob that he take us in his boat to a beach that is usually deserted.

Bob pointed to two men on the tiny beach near the short pier where Damianos moors his boat. One man, in his late 30s, was laying on his back on an inflated raft, eyes closed, the water and the man seeming motionless. The man was lightly sunburned and his hair very carefully combed. He seemed detached from everything. The other man was laying on a sleeping bag on shore, listening to music on a Walkman. He, too, was well-groomed, looked affluent, nonchalant, and disconnected from the world. A backpack was near the man on shore and a bottle of water. Bob said the two men were like Pinter characters then Bob laughed happily. Neither of the men noticed us.

We loaded our things on the boat and the three of us sat at the back while Damianos piloted the boat. It was a marvelous ride. On one stretch of beach there was a house that Bob pointed out and he said it had belonged to "Captain Tromeros" ("Captain Frightening" or "Captain Terrible"), a notorious German officer during World War II that the Greeks later killed. He said he'd tell us more about this Captain later. It was hard to talk over the engine noise, plus it seemed all of us were enjoying the scenery so much we didn't want to talk.

We passed one small island, really just a big rocky hill with a small chapel on one of its sides, and Bob said that Damianos went around to the little chapels on the barren islands and cleaned them out once a year and that no one else bothered to do that.

When we got close to a beach we saw nude people on the sand near a rubber raft with a motor. They had set up a white tarp with poles and as we

approached they walked behind the tarp. As we got closer they came out. There were two women and they remained topless, two young girls (they both looked around 8 years old) who were also topless, and two men who had put on small bathing suits.

The four of us swam, having set up near the small concrete pier where Damianos docked his boat. It was a wonderful place to swim. We'd swim out and then over to the left of a little rocky outcrop, which had a scattering of fish near it. The water was clear. Bob had brought Rachel Carson's book, *The Sea Around Us*, which he said he has been reading very slowly and enjoying. He said he reads a paragraph at a time and especially likes all the new vocabulary.

The other group of people seemed comfortable together, relaxed, and appeared to be having a good time. After about two hours none of them had gone into the water. Bob and Damianos joked that perhaps they didn't know how to swim. Bob commented, "They sure seem casual." Then he laughed and said, "I'd like to be an expert on being casual. I always thought being casual sounded like a good idea -- but I'm very uptight every second of the day."

Occasionally we heard several words that the other people were saying. Bob thought they were speaking German. Later one of the men approached us, followed by a topless woman and, trailing behind her, the two girls. I asked them where they were from. Vienna. Bob said he had some ancestors from there. Bob and the man and woman talked for a few minutes about the beach we were on and other beaches in the area.

They said they didn't like Italy because the beaches were always so jammed. The man was friendly, intelligent, and self-assured. They were all very tan. Then the two girls went into the water and had fun frolicking.

The four of us had lunch, the same sort of lovely picnic lunch we'd enjoyed on Patmos: tomatoes, bread, cheese, a canned fish, watermelon. Then we waited a while before going swimming again.

After we were back on the beach Bob told us the story of Captain Tromeros, whose house we had passed. He was a German officer who had come to Patmos with a 19-year-old boy from another island during World War II. The Captain killed a lot of people on Patmos and had a number of informers working for him, including the boy.

One day some of the islanders went to his house. The Captain knew they had come to kill him. They drank all afternoon and in the evening, after the Captain was drunk, the islanders tied up him and the boy. They put them onto a boat and then one of the islanders, not acting according to the plans, shot both the Captain and the boy. The boy had pleaded with them not to kill him because he said he had been taken by force from his island by the Captain and then had been forced to help the Captain. Many of the islanders were upset that the boy had been shot.

After Bob told the story and we talked some more we went swimming again. A fisherman came near the shore, alone in a boat, and he and Damianos exchanged loud good-natured shouts. Damianos told us that this fisherman's brother had married Damianos's daughter. The fisherman placed nets into the water, near where we had been swimming earlier, and left.

As we were preparing to leave the fisherman returned and after we left the beach the fisherman steered his boat parallel to ours for a while and we all waved and smiled at the man. He kept going straight out and we turned and headed back to Skala.

After we reached Skala, Damianos stayed with the boat and Bob, Leslie and I walked back towards the hotel. Bob pointed at the blue neon cross on the hillside across from Skala and asked if we thought it would be better if it were white neon instead of blue. I couldn't decide and then asked how long it had been there. Bob didn't know. He said a woman from California had paid for it to be put there. He said he'd prefer it white if it had to be there.

When we got to the hotel Bob headed home, after inviting us to his house after we ate dinner. We finished dinner at about 9:00 and both felt exhausted. When we got to Bob's I immediately said we'd only be staying five minutes because we were tired, but he asked us to sit down and clearly wanted us to stay longer. After a while I looked around the room at the piles of books and magazines and said that if I were in Patmos for a few weeks, instead of only several more days, I'd build some bookshelves for him.

He said bookshelves would be nice, but what he really wanted the most was a table he could type on. He added that the next door neighbor's husband (the neighbors were relatives of the landlady) was a carpenter and had built him a good work table and then Bob asked him to build him a table for his typewriter and the man said he would. But, Bob said, that was a long time ago and

Bob has felt embarrassed about bringing it up again and thought that sooner or later the man might do it. I asked if he could buy a little table at a furniture store and he said there were no furniture stores on the island.

Bob said he could also use bookshelves. I said that if Bob wanted I could build him a simple bookshelf with boards and bricks. We talked about that and Bob seemed interested. Bob said he would pay for it, although I had planned on paying for it myself.

After a little while Leslie and I left, having agreed to meet the next morning to travel with Damianos on the boat to a nearby beach on Patmos.

Wednesday, July 10th

Leslie and I visited the Sacred Cave in the morning. There were a lot of tour buses parked outside it and it was crowded. We only spent about two minutes in the Cave. Several tour guides were lecturing groups.

Around 11:00 we met Bob at the hotel and then met Damianos and his wife. Damianos took us all to the nearby beach. Damianos's wife works at a restaurant near the beach and had to leave. Then Bob and Damianos left to do errands, suggesting we meet them at the restaurant for dinner at 5:30.

The beach was crowded and there were many nudists. It was hard to find anywhere to sit and we sat among the nudists, in the minority of those who wore any clothing. It was very hot. Bob had lent me Jay McInerney's novel, *Bright Lights, Big City*, suggesting I read it. He said he had showed it to his friend Howard Gold, but Gold had taken a quick look at it and said he wasn't interested. Bob worked at *The New Yorker* when he was a young man and the protagonist in the novel also worked at the magazine.

Around 5:30 we went to the restaurant to wait for Bob and Damianos. They arrived around 6:30.

Bob commented over dinner that he has never read much Proust. He has begun *Swann's Way* a few times, but never got very far because he likes books where the action happens "right on the page in front of you" instead of in a long drawn-out narrative as in Proust. Bob said James Joyce, especially in *Finnegans Wake*, wrote a book in which things happen on every page. Then Bob said e. e. cummings and Miro are like that too.

Bob said he liked the McInerney novel because it was funny and savvy. He commented that it is rare to find many young writers today who are savvy. He said he thought some of the book is very clever, but that the ending is weak and the character just seems to ride off into the sunset towards happiness, an ending that didn't feel appropriate for the book.

After dinner we returned to the boat and returned to Skala. And Bob suggested that tomorrow morning we visit Damianos's chapel on Patmos.

Thursday, July 11th

We met Bob in the morning to go visit the chapel. We walked up a hill to meet Damianos. He was busy working on a big house. Some of the shutters and doors of the house had been removed and he was working on them. He said he couldn't come with us to his chapel. So we walked up to his house to get the key from his wife.

Damianos lives in a handsome, small house, with a beautiful garden. His wife was very friendly again.

The little chapel, near the house, is well-constructed. It is lovely inside, with fine icons, a number of them hand-painted. Bob explained that Damianos had ordered some of them from painters in Athens. And that sometimes Damianos had been able to save the money to buy them himself while sometimes he had been helped by contributions from friends.

While we were in the chapel Bob said that he had a Franciscan spiritual director who said you need not only a place, but also a time for prayer and/or worship. And Bob said he went every day to a crypt in the library of the monastery where he lived for a while and that is when he wrote his book-length poem, *The Circus of the Sun*. Bob said he wrote it just as it came, not bringing along any of the notes he had taken, and that almost all of the book as published is exactly how he first wrote it.

That afternoon Leslie and I went swimming with Bob and Damianos. As we walked to the place where we'd swum the first day, not a beach with sand but a place without tourists where you walked down to the water over dirt, I asked Bob about something I'd read in a book about the pride of people on Kalymnos. Bob said yes, they are proud people, but the Patmos islanders are also proud, although proud of something different.

He said the Patmos islanders are proud of living a decent life and the way he talked about it made clear he was speaking of ethics. The people on Kalymnos, on the other hand, are proud because they know how to live well, happily, and they believe they have an exciting life and Bob said he thinks they are right, they do know how to live well and live with a lot of gusto and style.

At the beach, Bob spoke of different times in his life when he had a studio where he could go and write. There'd be nothing but a desk, a chair, a typewriter and paper; he'd begin writing as soon as he arrived. He said for much of his life he had had such studios, but he doesn't have one on Patmos. He had had one on Kalymnos. He said he thinks such a studio is a big help.

Damianos joined us and we had lunch. Then Damianos went back to work and Leslie, Bob and I walked up to Bob's house. Once again I brought up the possibility of building a brick and board bookshelf for Bob. He said he didn't think that it was really necessary because he usually sent most of his books to his publisher's house in Zurich. His publisher had a special room for Bob's books and things. But then Bob said that random papers, manuscripts, letters, clippings, and other things were a problem. Friends had sent him a lot of mail and he tended to keep it rather than make himself decide what to throw out.

That afternoon Leslie, Bob and I went through his papers. He decided to discard more than half of them. He kept many articles about Olean ("home") and every article about James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. He also had one on Wallace Stevens he wanted to keep and another on Williams Carlos Williams he kept. Other writers that he had clippings on that he did not want to get rid of included Kafka, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Lowell, and Sartre. Also, of course, he kept all the clippings about circuses.

We spent almost all of the rest of the afternoon going through the papers, sorting through boxes of materials, and then kept working until almost midnight. We still had a lot to go through when we decided to quit for the night.

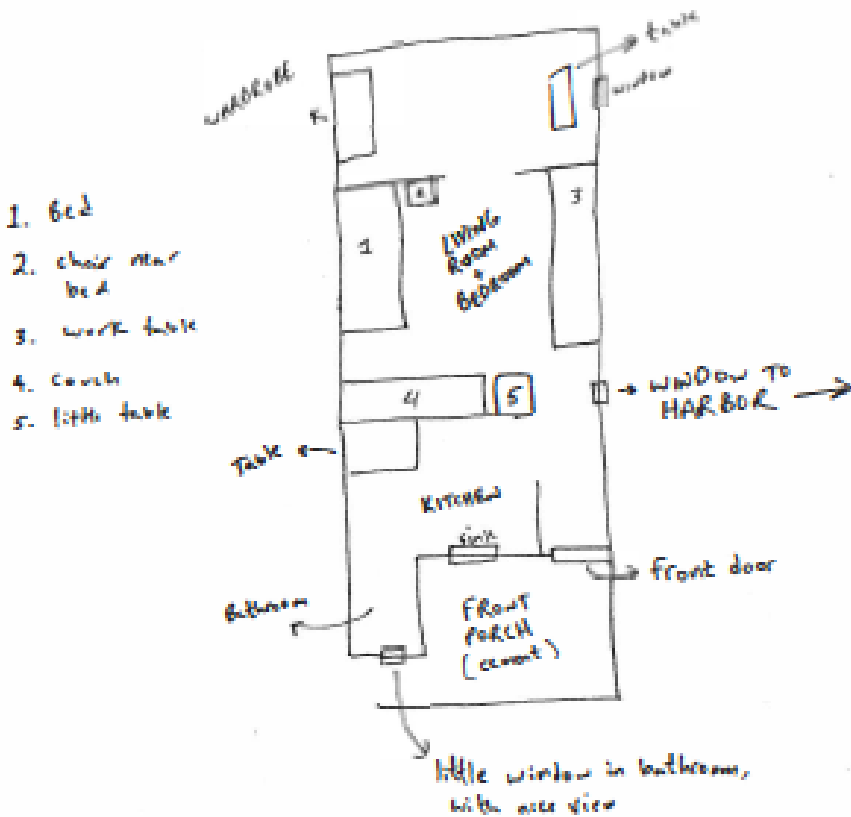
Friday, July 11th

We checked out of the hotel and walked up to Bob's house in the morning. We hoped to finish sorting through the boxes full of papers. This time we concentrated on correspondence and manuscripts. Bob had arranged to go swimming with Damianos around noon. He invited us to go with him, but we decided we'd rather keep working on organizing things for him (and also since we'd checked out of the hotel we wouldn't have been able to shower after swimming and we had a ferry ride ahead of us later). Bob left us at the house and returned at around 2:00. Bob said Damianos had sent us his blessings.

After Bob got back we worked for about another hour. Finished, we were happy and triumphant that we had managed to get so much done. And then we noticed a box that we hadn't seen. It was mostly full of clippings and letters. By then it was too late to begin looking through it.

Bob gave us a few books of his writing, signing them for us, and also gave us a tape recording of his reading in Stuttgart. He walked us down to the harbor. We were taking a ferry to Samos. He walked onto the boat with us, carrying some of our things. Bob left and then our boat went out, past that blue neon cross.

Very ROUGH Sketch of His Place



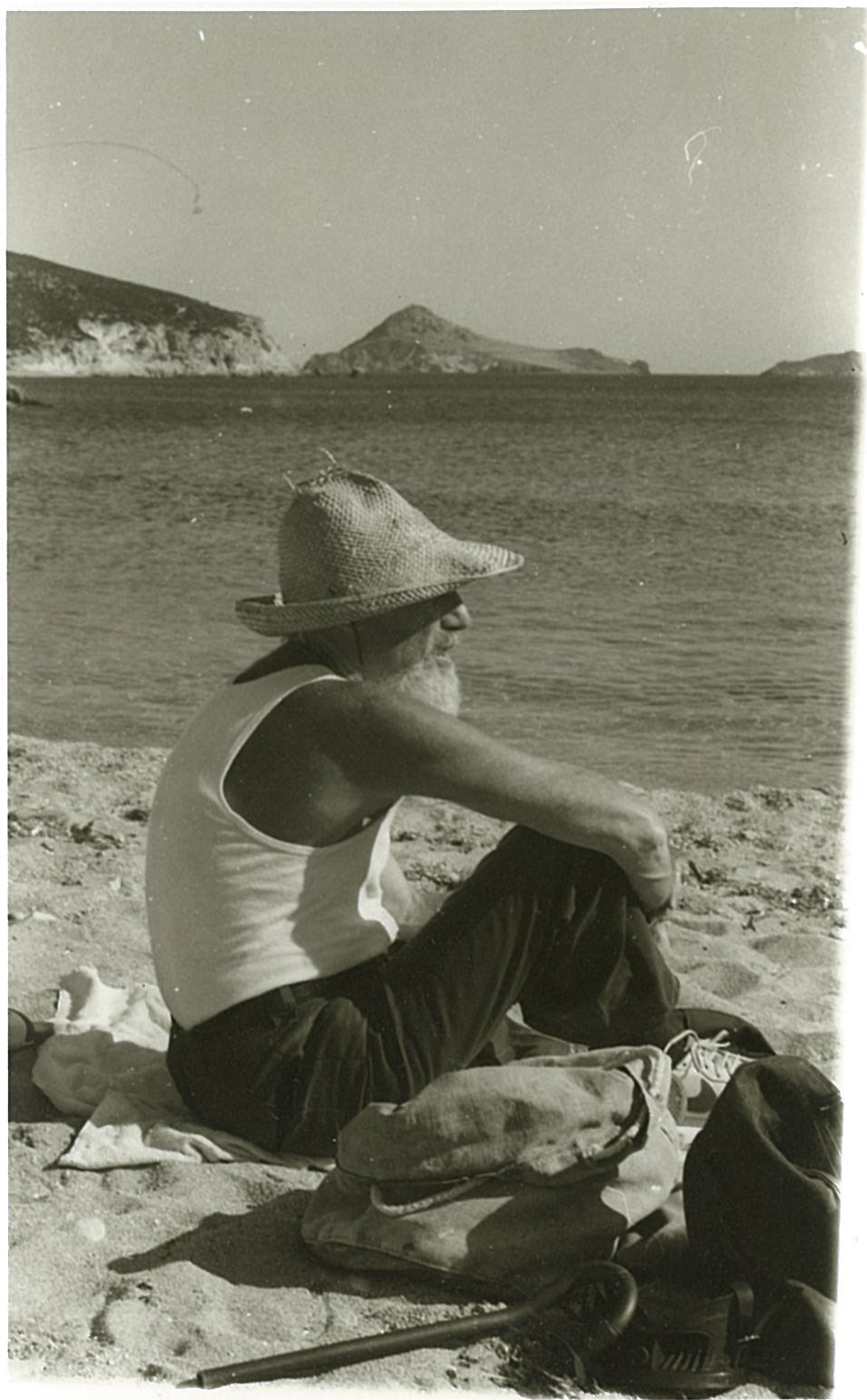
ONE HALF OF
A HOUSE

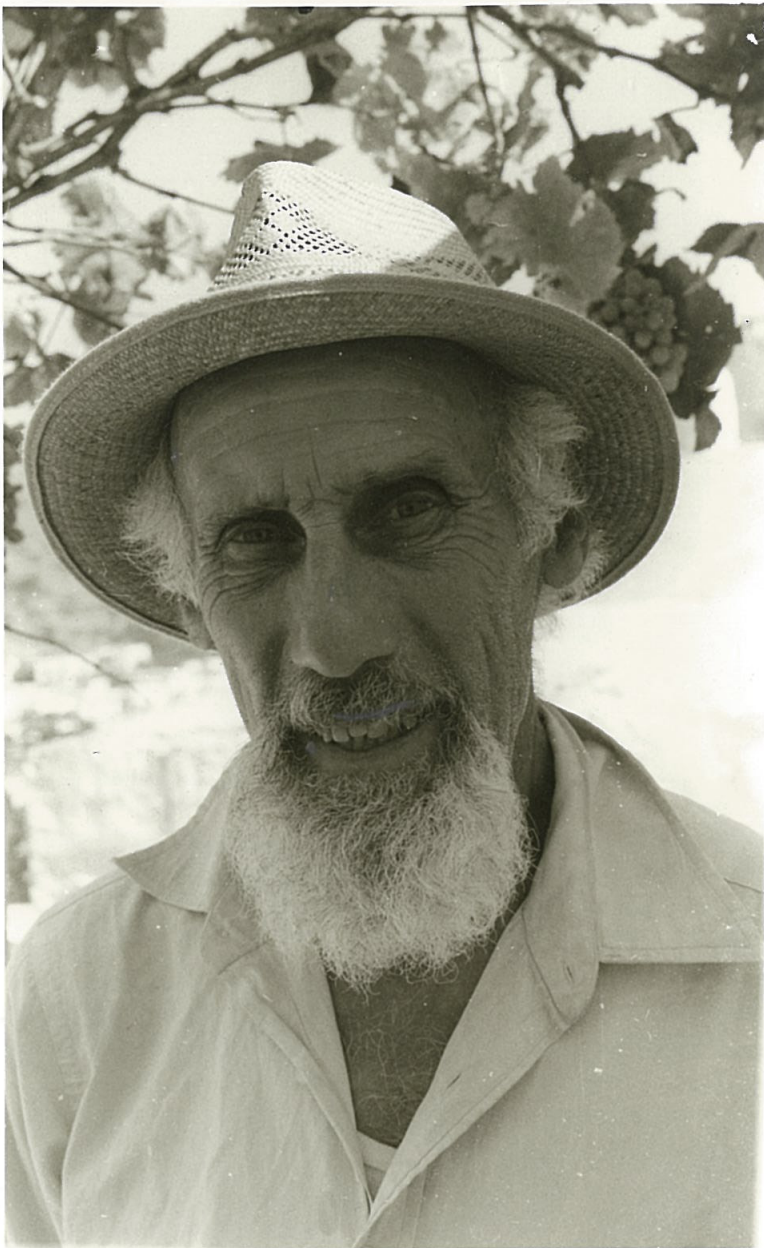




l.-r. the fisherman Damianos, John Levy, Robert Lax

photograph by Leslie Buchanan





Note on the Photos

I took the photos, except for the one that Leslie Buchanan took on the boat trip on Damianos's boat and the color photo, which Bob asked a Patmos photographer (who had a photography studio) to take of us. The color photo was taken on a later visit to Bob on Patmos in early January 1991. — *JL*

Cid Corman
and ORIGIN: A Personal Account

David Miller



Photo of David Miller that Bob Lax had on his wall and which John Levy mentions on p.25, above. It was taken by the archaeologist Mark Beech.

Cid Corman and ORIGIN: A Personal Account

David Miller

(1.) My decision to write about my own relationship to Cid Corman and ORIGIN stems from the fact that my involvement has been very personal; I could, no doubt, try to look at the history of the journal, and Corman's work as a poet, critic, translator and editor, from a strictly impersonal angle; but these facts would still remain: that I began corresponding with Corman, and sending him work (intended for ORIGIN), as a fairly young poet, so that my years of involvement with ORIGIN were crucial years in my development as a writer; that I became a close friend of Cid Corman's; and that I was an Associate Editor of the Fifth Series of ORIGIN. Better to say what I can say best.

(2.) Sometime early in 1977, the poet Frank Samperi generously suggested to me that I should send Cid Corman some work for the new (Fourth) series of his journal ORIGIN, soon to be launched. That was the beginning.

(3.) I'd known and respected Corman's poetry for some years; and I knew *The Gist of ORIGIN*, his anthology of work from the first three series of the journal. The anthology had been something of a revelation: Corman's early printing of Charles Olson and Robert Creeley was, of course, well-known; but looking through the pages of this extraordinary book, one saw that he had also published William Bronk, Larry Eigner, Robert Duncan, Gael Turnbull, Paul Blackburn and Theodore Enslin, in the '50s; Louis Zukofsky, Gary Snyder, Lorine Niedecker, Robert Kelly, Ian Hamilton Finlay, André du Bouchet, Denis Goacher, Jean Daive and John Taggart, in the '60s; and Philippe Jaccottet, Samperi, Philip Whalen and Daphne Marlatt, in the early '70s. And of course my list is only a sampling (of a sampling).

(4.) In a letter dated Spring Equinox 1977 (Utano), which I believe to be the second letter that I received from Corman, he wrote :

“Be patient with me – if I seem not to cotton exactly to what you're striving for – and if you care to spell it out – fine. I'm more than willing to listen.”

He subjected the writings that I sent him to a detailed and probing examination, always with an eye to exactitude as well as liveliness. At the same time, I confess that at one point I came to the conclusion that we would not, after all, see eye-to-eye about my work – but we did.

(5.) “...I'm not an apologist for ANY movement: – I yield only to the particular work.” (23rd August 1977, Utano.) The range of Corman's sensibility and sympathies is evident from *ORIGIN*; and it was driven home to me by a meeting with Denis Goacher in August or September of 1977. Goacher, of course, had been in many issues of *ORIGIN*, over a long period of time. He told me that Cid had been mistaken in publishing Frank Samperi, whose work Goacher evidently felt no respect for; and he made it clear that he felt the same way about Louis Zukofsky. I should perhaps add that the poets Cid published have often, like Samperi, been far removed from membership in any “movement”. He has been drawn to sponsor the work of quite dissimilar writers, without thought to “movements”, “schools”, “groups”, etc.

In 1982 (Summer Solstice, from Boston), Cid wrote to me that a certain poet's “lumping *ORIGIN* poets together as a school is fatuous and of course inaccurate.” “...I've made a point – to my own detriment mostly – not to have disciples or create a shoal. I do think of all of us as a community – but a community of individuals and the differences are vital and to be encouraged.

“I like to think the range of poetry in ORIGIN has been immense – yet always fine.”

That range is exemplified in the Fourth and Fifth Series, with the inclusion of such writers as André du Bouchet and Clive Faust, John Perlman and Armand Schwerner, Irving Layton and Mark Karlins, Kusano Shimpei and Jackson Mac Low, Andy Echavarria and Graham Lindsay, Roger Laporte and Ron Silliman. An ORIGIN school? Certainly, one learnt from reading ORIGIN; from being involved with it, and with Corman....

(6.) I have stated elsewhere: “Cid Corman has given me a great deal of encouragement and useful criticism. I think that his notions that the language in a poem should be active throughout the poem, and that each word has to pull its own weight (so to speak), helped me in consolidating my own sensibility and craft.” (“Interview with James Crouch”; *POST-NEO* no. 1, Supplement no. 1, 1984.)

(7.) “Poetry needs personal dissemination: just as love does”, Cid wrote on the 19th of March 1977 (from Utano). This notion was reflected in his distribution of ORIGIN. His early letters to me ask for addresses of writers who would “appreciate / be stimulated by ORIGIN.” “I’m trying to evolve the best poetry mailing list imaginable.” (8th April 1977, Utano.) Copies were sent out free to many people, simply because Cid felt that certain people should receive it – and he well enough knew that writers, especially young writers, often can’t afford subscriptions.

The same kind of generosity would lead Cid to initiate contact between writers. I am thankful to Cid, not only for my awareness of the work of poets like George Evans, John Levy, Billy Mills, Clive Faust and John Perlman, but also my friendships with them.

(8.) Corman’s independence, and resistance to the fashionable, can be seen in the following remark: “...what passes as vanguard at any given moment often has more to do with publicity and accident than anything else. Blake – Hopkins – Dickinson were unknown virtually as poets in their heyday. And I wd venture to say that most of the key figures of our own time – as seen 100 years hence – will not be quite those who took up most widespread attention.” “There is NO doubt in my mind that Zukofsky – say – will loom much larger.” (May Day 1983, Utano.) These same qualities are also evident in his comments on the currently fashionable English poet Craig Raine: “...I can see why people

might cotton onto it, but it is like that spunsugar candy on a stick. It busies attention with unexpected connections that seem very smart, but which don't get under at all. A lot of surface crackling." (23rd January 1985, Utano.) Or in this (28th December 1978, Boston): "Reading 4 new books on Olson. The academicizing process has begun: all very ironic. And I feel like I have a front row seat at a grotesque spectacle." Of course, it is the fashionable academics who are the targets here. Consider also this: "Ekbert Faas did a book on recent poetics for BLACK SPARROW. I think it feeble – confused and confusing. Jarrell/Berryman/Lowell all seem to me leftovers from the Poundian pot – trying to make it modishly academic. There is some resounding phrase-making here and there and that's it. Larkin, even less. Hughes a joke. A bad joke at that." (2nd September 1980, Boston.)

The dissatisfaction evident here – a dissatisfaction that is primarily to do with the way that authentic poetry is obscured by specious writing (whether of poets, critics or academics) – led Corman to project a criticism journal, ACUMEN (of which, more later). But it has been a motivation in many of his activities as editor, critic, essayist and translator.

(9.) Corman wrote to me on 20th June 1977 (from Utano): "The thought of featuring you in an issue next year is in my mind and if you are interested and care to keep letting me see where you're at – I suspect we can work out something."

Some of my poetry appeared in ORIGIN Fourth Series no. 6 (January 1979), and a letter (on André du Bouchet) and an essay (on John Taggart) in no. 7 (April 1979). For some time, Cid and I thought of using a prose work on Gérard de Nerval as the main part of my feature; in the event, no. 8 (July 1979) featured a selection of my poems, written during the two years I'd been in contact with Corman.

(10.) The Nerval text, *There and Here*, was the first of two longer (prose) projects that were discussed in my correspondence with Cid during the years when he was editing the Fourth and Fifth Series of ORIGIN. The other was *WH Hudson and the Elusive Paradise*, which I will come back to at a later stage. But for the moment, I should mention that these two books are entirely in contrast with each other. The Hudson text was undertaken as a piece of "scholarly" writing, even if its approach owes more to historians of ideas than to literary historians; the Nerval, on the other hand, is completely anti-scholarly in approach: it is a poetic meditation on the images and symbols that can be discovered from reading existing English translations of Nerval.

There and Here was eventually excluded from ORIGIN because its length would have precluded using anything else of mine in the feature issue, and Cid wanted to publish a selection of my poems.

Of Nerval, Cid wrote to me on Christmas eve 1980 (from Boston): “Nerval remains vital to me too. The poems: which are sui generis. And SYLVIE: as pure as writing can get. He does something with French – goes to the heart/genius of the language as no one else does – not even Rimbaud or Char. The language becomes both luminous and numinous.”

(11.) On the 3rd of October 1979, Cid wrote to me from Boston: “My 3rd essay volume is the one likeliest to get attention since it thwacks Robt Lowell notably hard and in considerable detail. But then I have a terrible inclination not to generalize without almost excessive evidence. It reflects the fact that I take nothing and no one for granted. But the book is mainly devoted to 19th century poets: Coleridge & Wordsworth and Browning. To Yeats. Up to Olson. It is largely intended to clarify poetics and critical approaches. My 4th volume is likely to include something on Marxist criticism as well as... my long piece on Stevens’ NOTES, etc.”

Those two collections – which were to have been published by Black Sparrow Press, as a follow-up to *Word for Word* and *At Their Word* – never appeared. Cid’s criticism played into another project, which he first mentioned to me in an earlier letter (20th May 1978, Utano); the Black Sparrow essays, he said, “shd feed into the critical mag I hope to launch in 1980 (and wd like you to be an active part of: a regular contributor to).” The magazine was first mentioned to me by name, as ACUMEN, in October 1978. The roots of this project were in that dissatisfaction of Corman’s, which I referred to earlier, and which can be vividly seen in the following comment (from a letter of 23rd May 1977, Utano): “There isn’t much of an outlet for genuine critical insight ANYWHERE – as far as I can see. The academic journals are incestuous and only cater to each other.”

He expanded upon his ideas for the journal in a letter of 23rd October 1979 (Boston), in which he said that he wanted Michael Heller to run ACUMEN: “(too much for me now) and I wd like you to be a contributing editor/ based in England. Clive [Faust] will be yr counterpart Down Under. And there will be 2 / 3 other intelligences basically involved. Essentially you will be wanted AS a contributor. This is offbeat criticism that will stimulate writing,

etc., but not reviewing (necessarily) current books. And anything is OK: you can review Galileo or Plato – experimental filmwork – a book on anatomy or botany. Whitehead’s mathematics or Einstein’s. Etc. Politics – economics – sports – clothing – food. Wherever there is something worth saying. And in a non-academic manner.

“Poetry will be the ‘vision’: center/focus/point of departure and return.”

On the 3rd of November 1979 (Boston), Cid suggested that my Nerval work could be used as a feature in ACUMEN. (In the end, it was published as a book by Bran’s Head Press in England, in 1982. Unfortunately, the printed version incorporated a number of textual errors – due to no fault of mine. This is also true, but to a lesser extent, of the printed text of *W H Hudson and the Elusive Paradise*.)

In this same letter, Cid reiterated one of the main reasons for wanting to establish ACUMEN: “The amount of awful stuff that passes as poetry is overwhelming nowadays and it seems as though very few can distinguish the fake from the genuine article. All of which puts a burden upon ACUMEN....” ACUMEN, of course, was to serve the cause of criticism; but only in order to serve the cause of poetry.

(12.) Corman published more of my work in ORIGIN in the 15th issue (April 1981) – an issue which also included Gil Ott. Cid’s ability to pick up on the most gifted of the younger poets shows itself in these last few issues of the Fourth Series, where Ott, Ted Pearson, Craig Watson, M J Bender and John Levy all appear.

(13.) A letter from Cid mentioned that Carroll Terrell, of the University of Maine at Orono, “quite out of the blue – proposed that I do a fifth series of ORIGIN (instead of ACUMEN).” “Each issue will allot about 1/3rd of the space to a featured poet. The rest will be – as I intended for ACUMEN – given to offbeat essays on any subject that leads into – through – or towards poetry. Non-academic in approach.” My Nerval piece was to be included. [Cid somehow can’t have been aware that it had been published in book form by this time.] “As well as some of yr WHHudson work.” (8th December 1982, Boston.)

(14.) References to W H Hudson began to appear in our correspondence in 1981 (the year that I began to write on Hudson). In a letter of that year, Cid

says: “I’m a great aficionado of WHHudson – I’m very fond of his books – particularly the naturalist ones. And if you look at my poetry collections – you will see WHH enter in. I’ve read his work to many audiences. Beautiful clean style.” (18th September 1981, Iowa.) To take a later reference to Hudson: “A great writer. He responds to nature and people very much as I do. And I like his lucidity plus that natural move into poetry.” (4th March 1983, Utano.)

In later letters, he mentions the possibility of reprinting a chapter from Hudson’s *Birds and Man* in ORIGIN (27th October 1984, Utano); and of opening issue no. 6 with a section from the beginning of Hudson’s *A Traveller in Little Things* (“a classic statement”) (24th December 1984, Utano). “And maybe will reprint other short segments later”, he adds in this same letter.

Eventually, Corman decided to put together a book of selections from Hudson. “I’m fishing to do a selected Hudson now – abt 250pp of stuff that (as far as I know) has not been reprinted by Dent or Oxford. Very interesting stuff and he benefits from selection. With a little intro. I’ve read all his REAL work now: the fiction/poetry not that interesting; better served by his prose.” (12th January 1985, Utano.) Unfortunately, this book has yet to find a publisher. [If I remember correctly, the only copy of the manuscript was eventually lost by a publisher to whom Cid had submitted it... but I’m hopefully misremembering.]

My own critical study of Hudson finally appeared in 1990, from Macmillan (London) and St Martin’s Press (NY). I dedicated it to Robert Hampson and Cid Corman.

(15.) The Fifth Series of ORIGIN began to appear in Fall 1983, under the auspices of Carroll Terrell and the National Poetry Foundation. Corman used the phrase “the community of individuals” as a motto for the series. His editorial intentions might be gauged (then, but also at any other time) by two statements from letters: “I’m not interested in blank-check applause. ORIGIN shd annoy people AND stimulate.” (13th July 1983, Utano.) “I want to encourage new talent and bring out the best of the older.” (24th May 1986, Utano.) By the time of the second statement, however, ORIGIN had already ceased to appear – even if the National Poetry Foundation hadn’t yet apprised us of the fact.

(16.) As I have already said, I acted as an Associate Editor for the series (along with Michael Heller, Clive Faust, Claude Royet-Journoud and Gaspari Wal-

ter; with George Evans, Gil Ott, Sherman Paul, Lyle Glazier and Ted Enslin serving as Contributing Editors). My own work (poetry, prose poetry, essays) also appeared in most issues; and I put forward certain writers (Guy Birchard, Michael Carlson and Robert Hampson) who were published in the six issues (of a projected twenty) that did appear.

The production and distribution of the series – wholly out of Corman’s hands, for the first time in the history of the journal – was badly managed, or so it has always appeared to me. Delays, lack of communication, subscription enquiries unanswered, copies not sent to the people who should have had them – and finally, the whole project was discontinued, with no word about it to Corman for many months.

I can only say it was a great shame. The series promised to be truly excellent. Writers familiar from former series, like Frank Samperi, George Evans and Lorine Niedecker, are there, together with new names, such as Pascal Quignard, Dominique Fourcade and August Kleinzahler. The seventh issue would have featured the very fine American poet Robert Lax, with a selection from his prose journals which I had made in 1983. (This selection is now due to be published by pendo verlag in Zürich, under the title *journal C*. Corman wrote to me: “Lax’s quietness may not appeal to everyone, but it seems eminently sane to me in a world conspicuously insane.” – Letter of 15th December 1986, Uta-no.) Kusano Shimpei, Jean Daive, and Barbara Moraff and Anne-Marie Albiach (in tandem) were due to be featured. An essay of Clive Faust’s on Grünewald would have been juxtaposed with my essay on the contemporary English painter Jennifer Durrant. And there was to have been work by Lawrence Fixel, Billy Mills, Marcel Cohen, Maurice Scully and Gad Hollander. Poems by Clive Faust, and his essay on Gary Snyder. My story ‘Biography’, and an essay of mine entitled ‘Rhetoric and Disclosure’ – an attempt at dismantling the concept of “style”.

(17.) The last issue of the series (no. 6) appeared in Fall 1985. During 1985/6, Corman also issued a number of poetry chapbooks under the Origin Press imprint, working in collaboration with Reno Odlin. There were booklets by Corman, Faust, du Bouchet, Samperi and myself. Again, it was a very promising venture (with only one real hiccup – my booklet, *Losing to Compassion*, and du Bouchet’s both incorporated some odd and confusing fluctuations in type-size, due I believe to an incorrect instruction that Odlin gave to the printer). A second series was planned, but never produced.

(18.) One further project should be mentioned briefly. On the 3rd of June 1988, Corman wrote to me from Utano that Robert Fitterman had suggested the compilation of “a book of letters of mine to younger poets but I’d prefer one of theirs to me – including yrs...” In a later letter, he says: “Anyhow, I’ve sent him about 64-70pp – most of which I had edited a few years back for a feature in ORIGIN.” (16th June 1988, Utano.) It is unfortunate that this book, also, has not appeared.

(19.) “Sometimes I think I shd just pack it in”, Cid wrote to me once, “do my own work, and let others do for themselves – but underneath there is a deep core that wants to be active in the community of poetry. I continue to feel it is the only thing that does matter.... And when I say ‘poetry’, of course, I mean the fullness of life realized and shared so.” (28th June 1986, Utano.)

Cid Corman’s importance must be seen in relation to his many activities, as poet, critic, essayist, translator and editor, as well as someone who consistently and generously encourages other writers and puts them in touch with each other. “I tend to stay open to everything, tho’ I respond only to individuals”, he says in one letter (12th January 1985, Utano); and this also touches on his disregard for “isms”, ideologies and movements in favour of an eclectic and lively notion of a “community of individuals”. But it is Corman’s concern for poetry, his openness to both the full complexities and possibilities of language, and integrity, depth and range of vision, which seems particularly vital to me. Let me conclude by quoting several remarks from his letters, that together give some idea, at least, of his sense of poetry.

(20.) “My work may – by [John Frederick] Nims of POETRY – be regarded as ‘too intelligent’ but it is and always will be an open poetry – a poetry made for every one who will take the trouble to READ and care for the language.” (26th April 1982, Boston.)

(A comment on painting that leads into a comment on poetry:) “Piero [della Francesca] is... an exquisite example of how the ‘realistic’ (and nothing could be more apropos for our time – tho we need to SEE Piero better yet) can be USED to project painting as VISION. Working on [Zukofsky’s] *A* verges on this issue.” “This is just where WE most meet – I think – in our mutual sense of this. (It permits of a greater range of poetry – much of it seeming of different orders – which is part of its power/attraction.)” (10th May 1983, Utano.)

“Poetry is uncertainty discovering meaning as a possible *modus vivendi* – but also the meaningless coming home/becoming home.” (3rd February 1983, Utano.)

“Poetry is still and always will be dependent upon language being lived to maximum effect/dimension. And it must continually yield to rereadings.” (Summer Solstice 1989, Utano.)

“Language – when operative – is more than figurative: it is event itself – human event *par excellence*. I’m of course completely prejudiced and so feel that poetry is the key art; that is, THE revelatory medium of human nature.” (4th October 1978, Utano.)

London, April 1990

A Note

I came across this text when I was recently going through some old manuscripts in boxes. I had completely forgotten about it. And I no longer remember if it was written for any particular occasion or with a particular journal in mind. I am certain, however, that it never appeared anywhere in print: I would have a record of this if it had.

Although Cid Corman and I remained in touch for many years after this piece was written, I believe that the period from 1977 to 1990 was definitely the most important in our years of literary association and friendship.

~

I'm sure there are a number of people I should have mentioned in the course of this memoir/essay and have neglected to do so. I can only apologise. One person I do want to mention here, however, is the poet John Phillips. John was someone else who was to have been featured in the Sixth Series of *ORIGIN*. I am fairly certain that Cid suggested that I get in contact with John, but for some reason I didn't – until Clive Faust, or possibly Gael Turnbull (I'm unsure), made the same suggestion a little later. I first wrote to John sometime in 2004 – very probably after Cid's death on the 12th of March that year. I have published John's poetry with my tiny imprint, Kater Murr's Press, and he has also become a close friend over the years.

~

Two further things I'd like to mention:

Robert Lax's *journal C* was indeed published by pendo verlag, shortly after 'Cid Corman and *ORIGIN*' was written. Some years later, Nicholas Zurbrugg and I edited the book *The ABCs of Robert Lax* (Stride Publications, 1999), and Cid was one of the contributors to the volume.

I never agreed with Cid about W H Hudson's fiction. In fact, I recently provided the introduction to a reprint of Hudson's book of short fiction, *El Ombú* (ReScript Books, 2015). It is, I believe, an extraordinary achievement, as is his novel *Green Mansions*.

~

Only a few very small changes have been made to this text, as well as a few small additions (in square brackets).

I want to acknowledge the assistance of Bob Arnold, Cid Corman's literary executor, in giving me permission to quote from Cid's letters. In addition, acknowledgement is due to the following organisation for also granting me permission to quote from nineteen letters held in their archives (151 letters from Cid Corman to David Miller, 1977-1982, R13232):

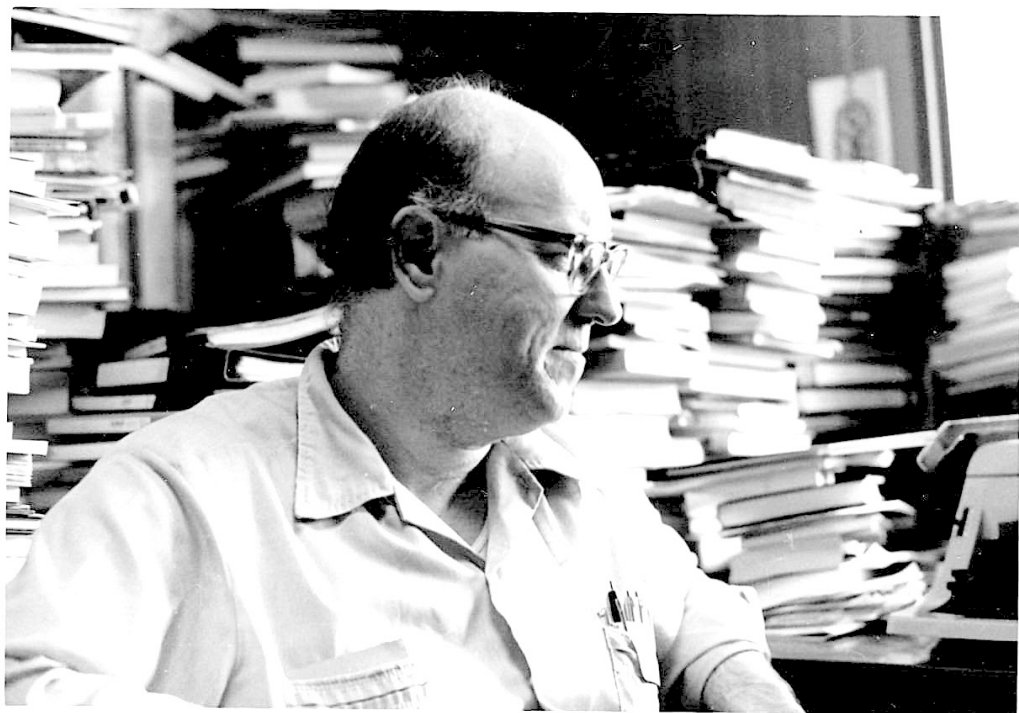
Harry Ransom Center
The University of Texas at Austin

David Miller, London, May 2015

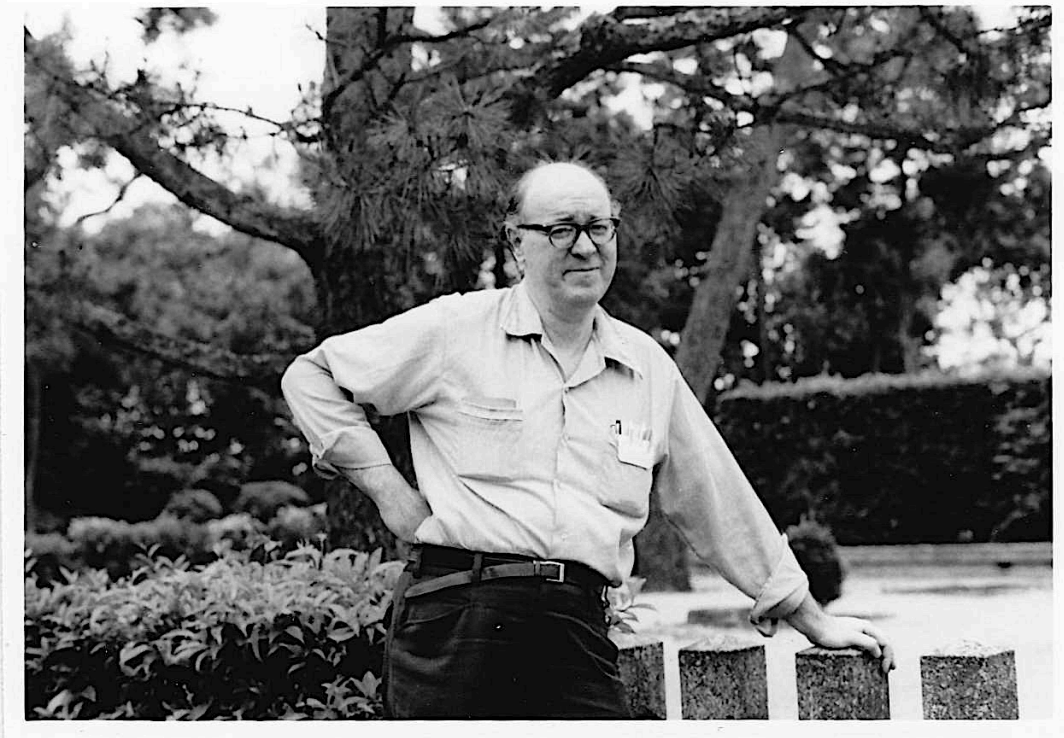
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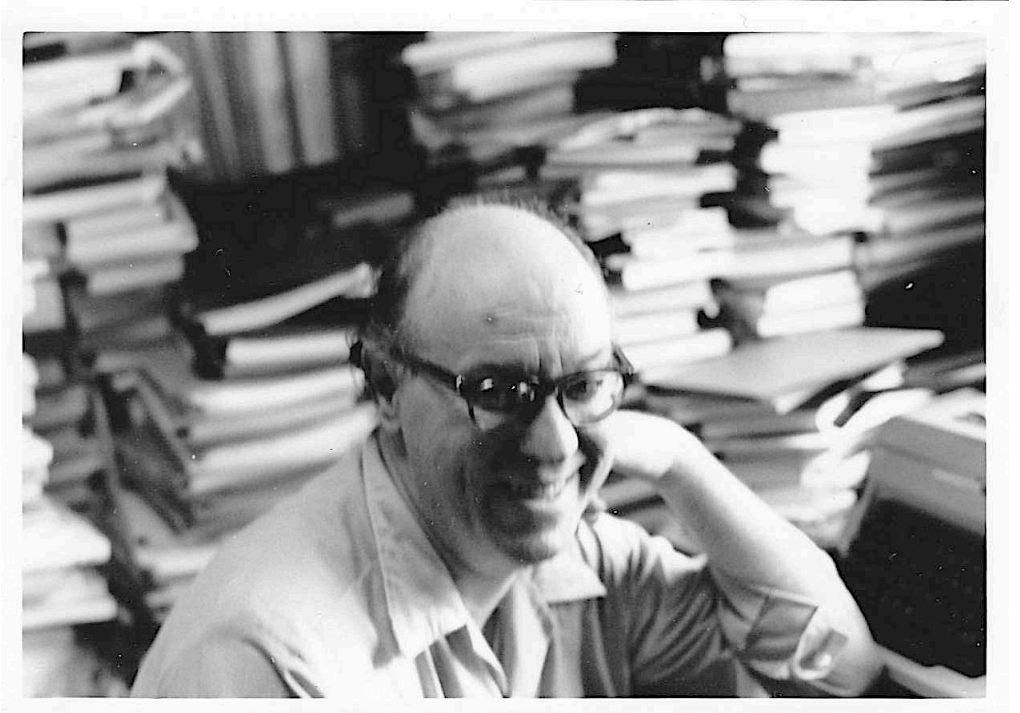
Cid Corman and Shizumi
in Kyoto

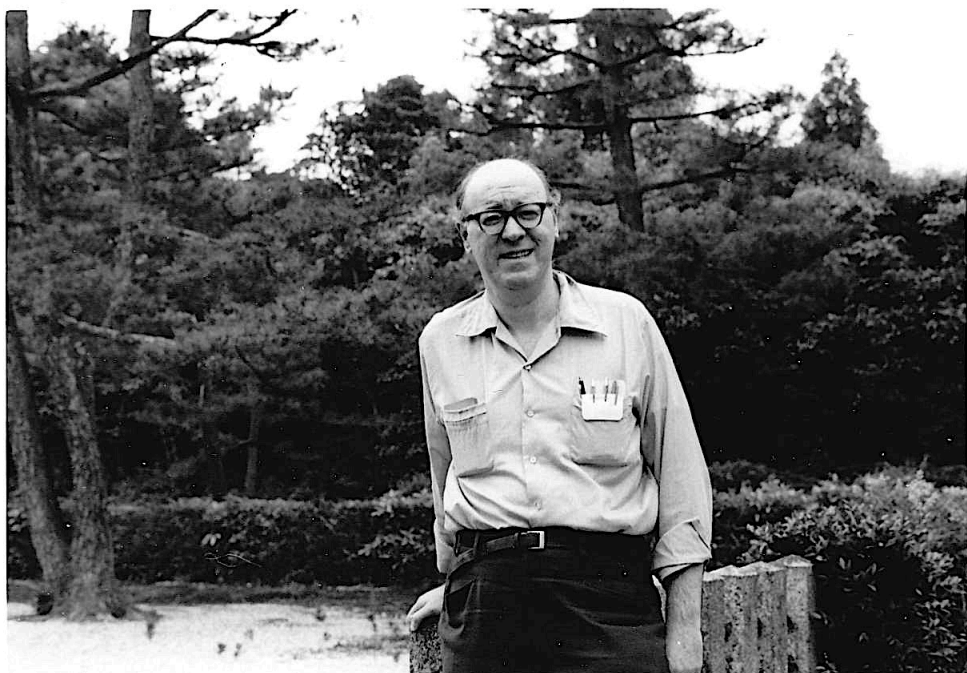
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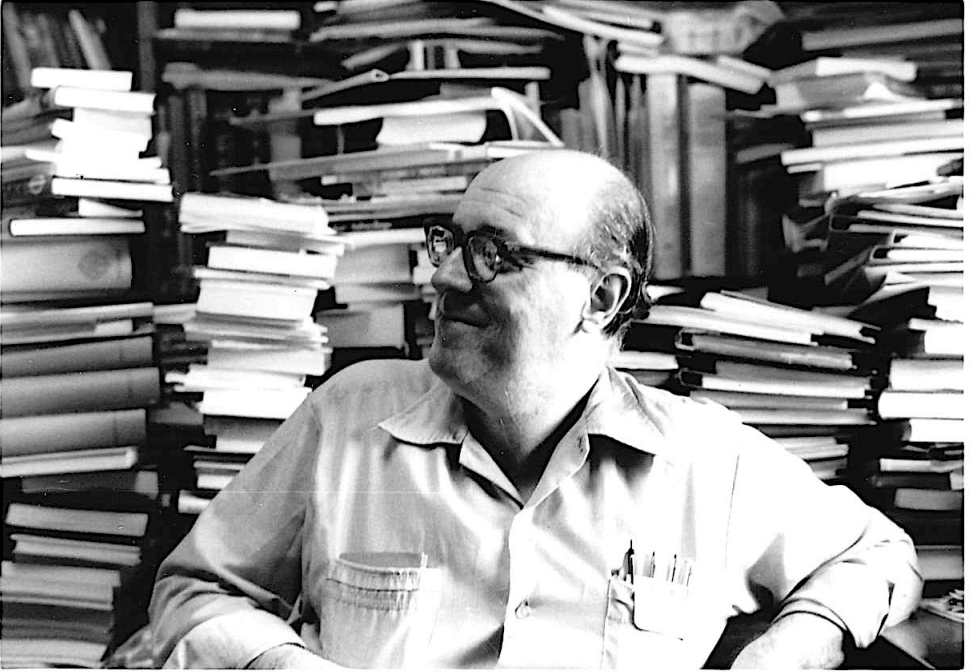


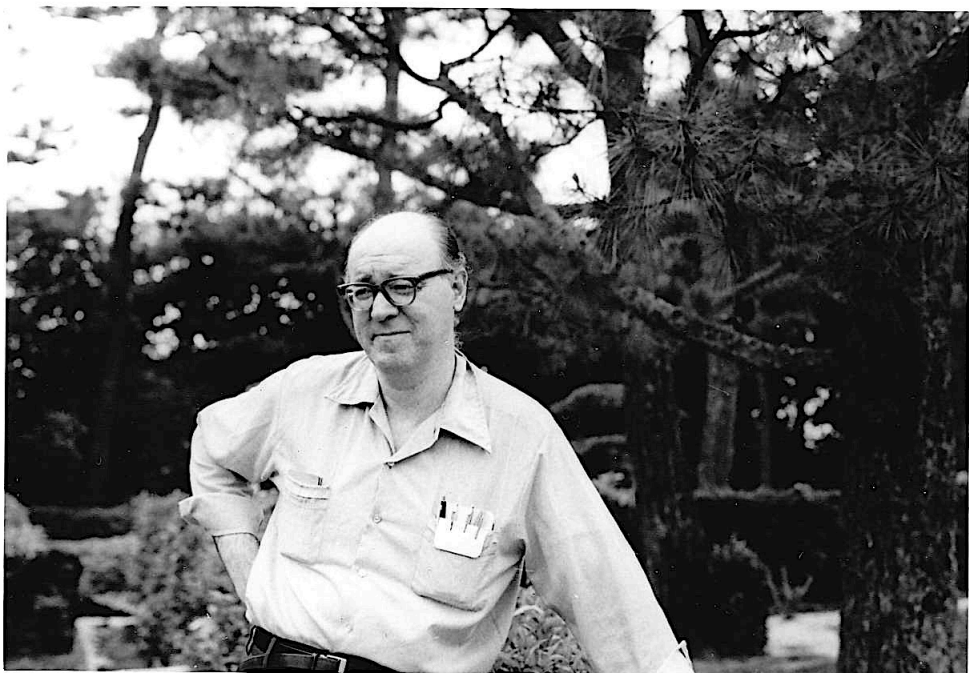


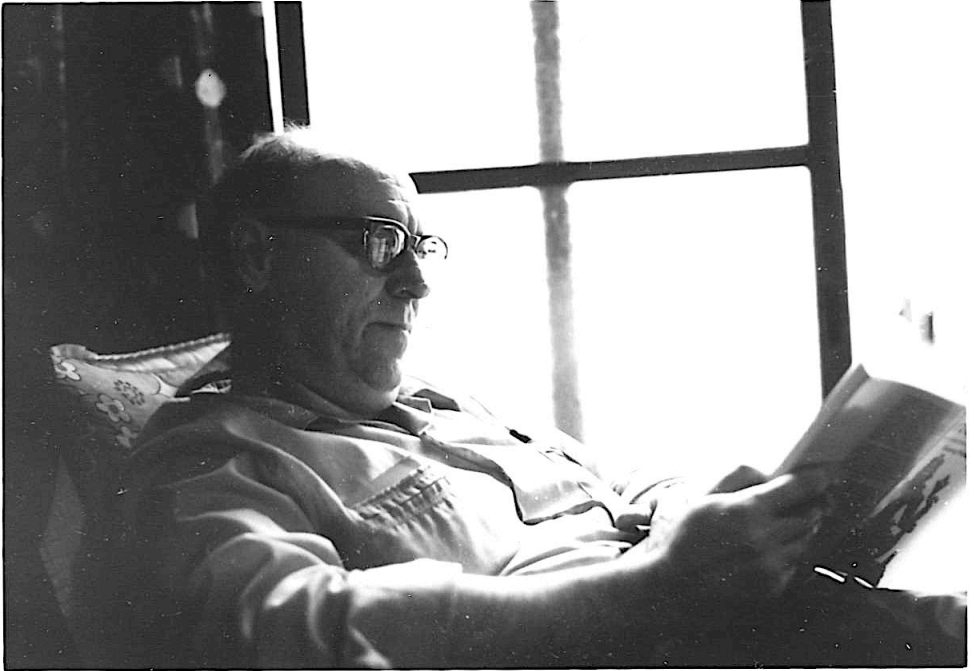






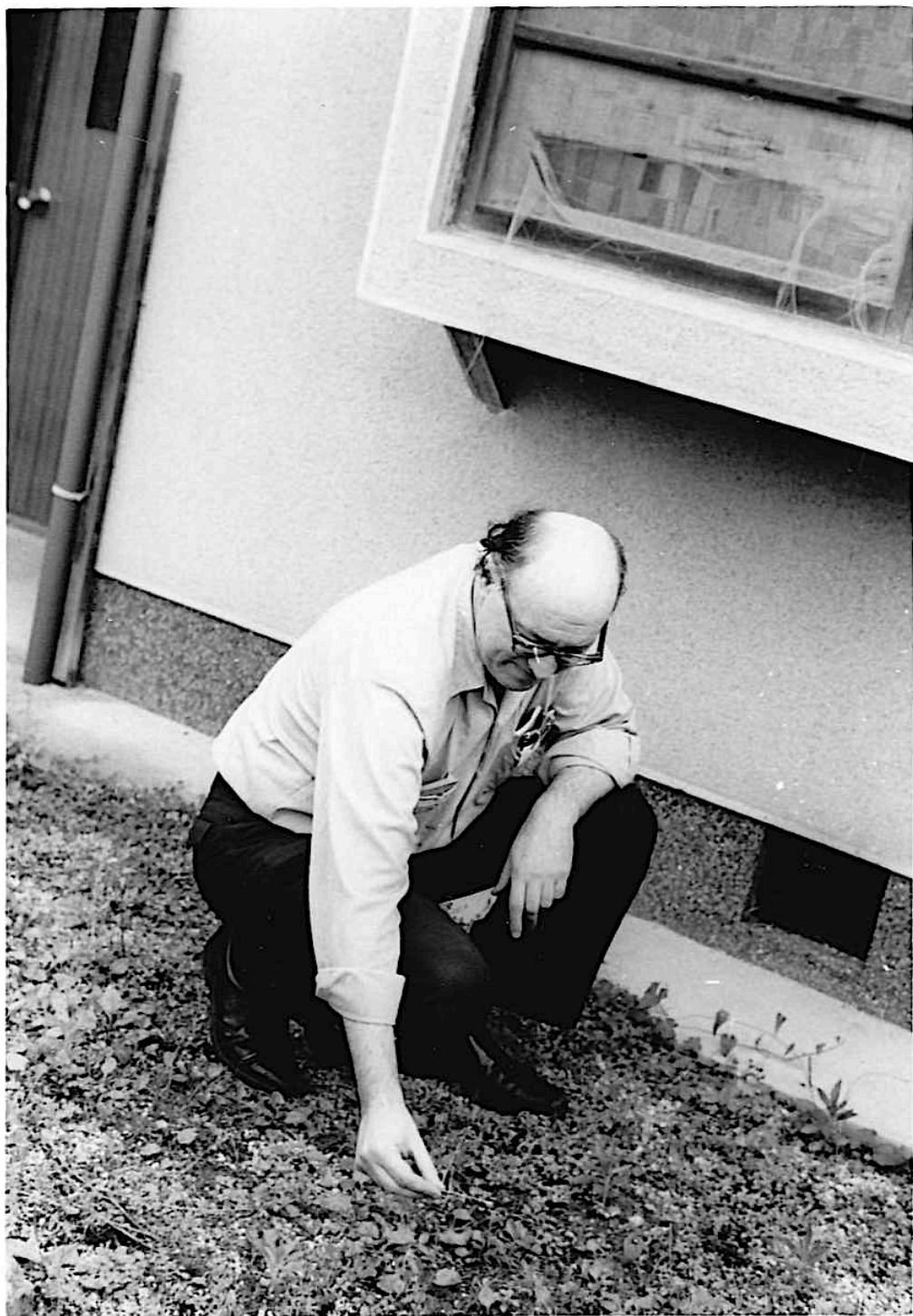


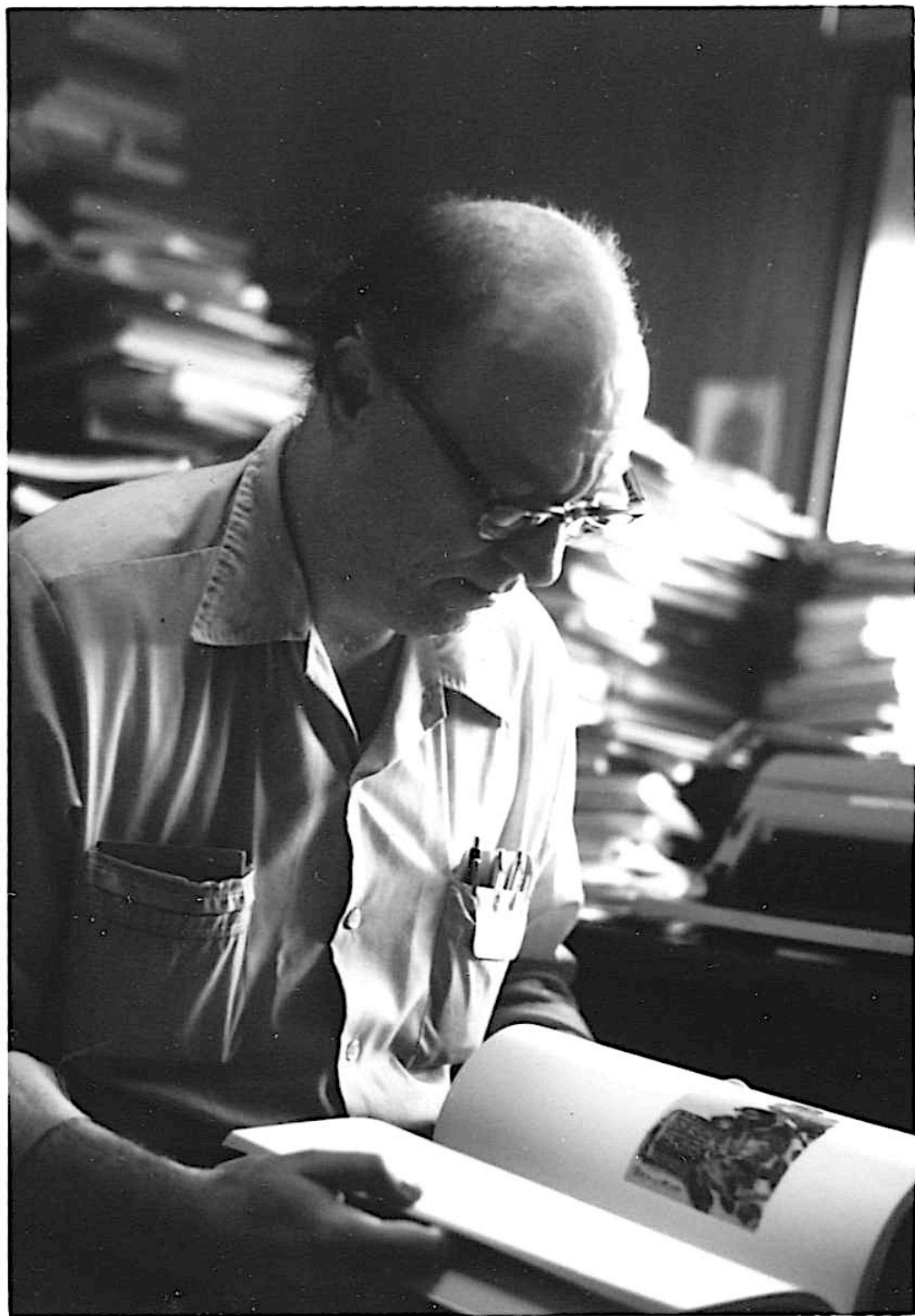


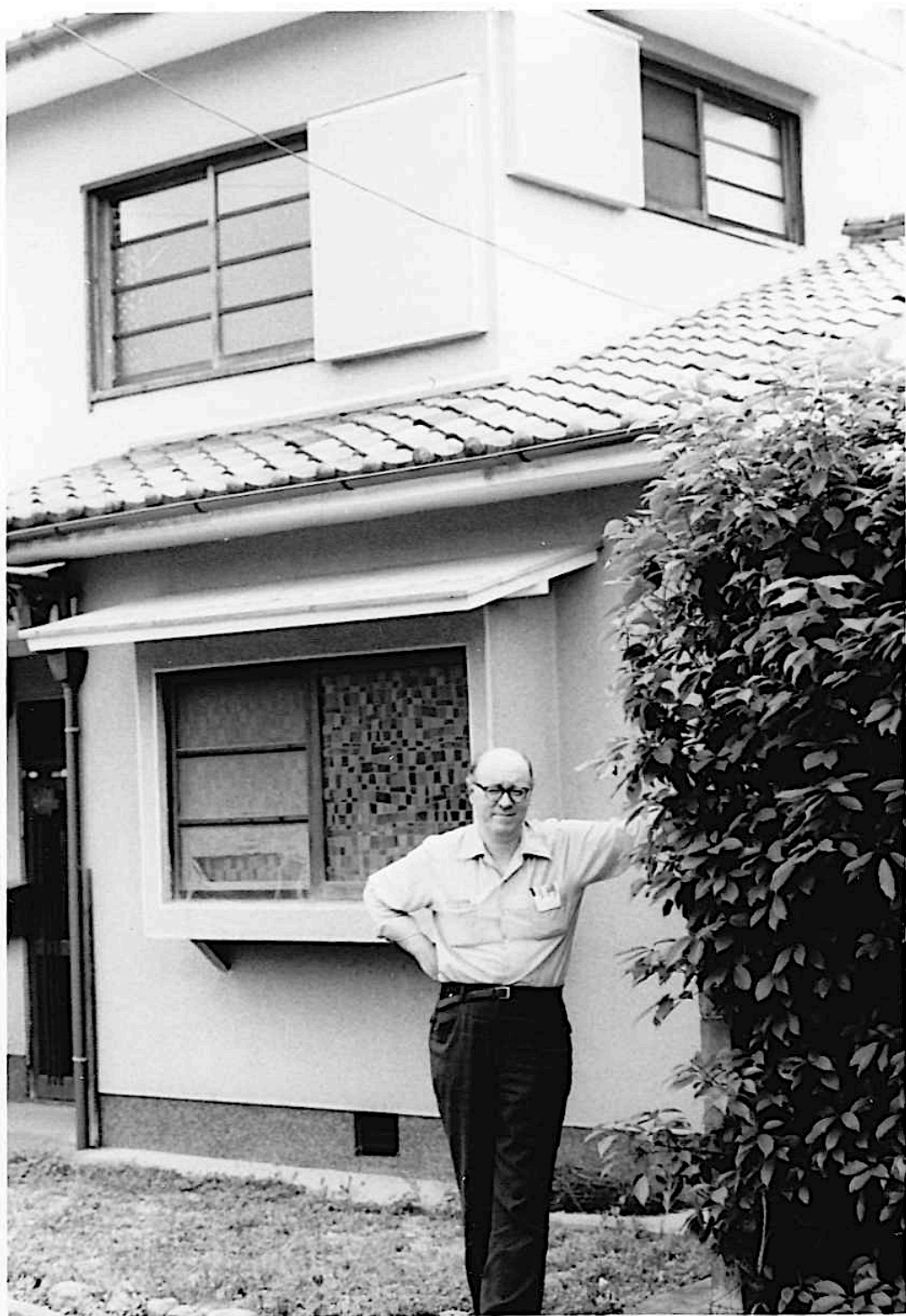


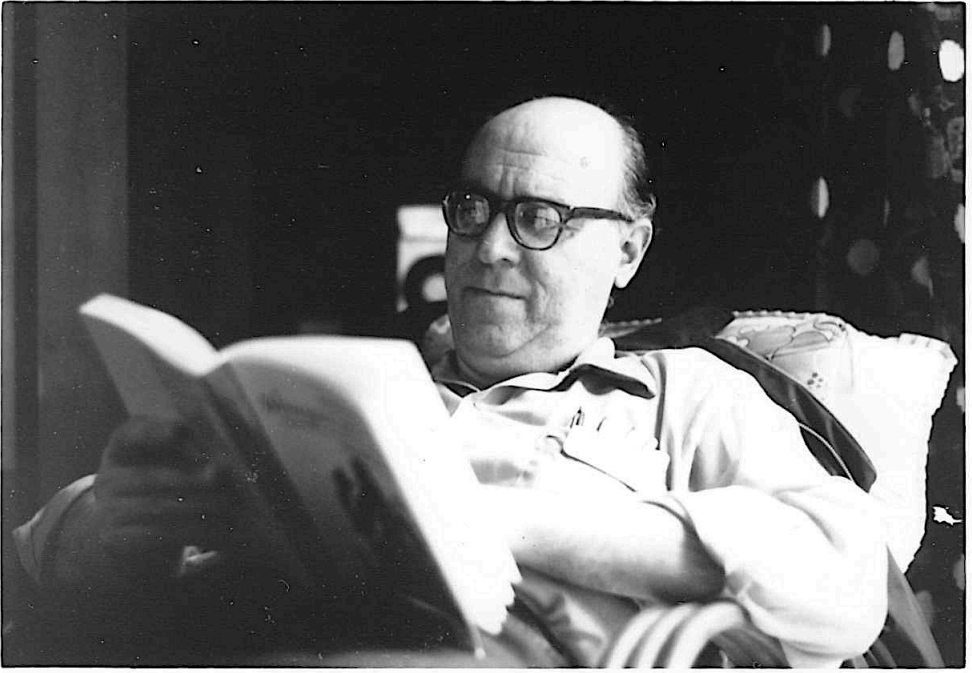


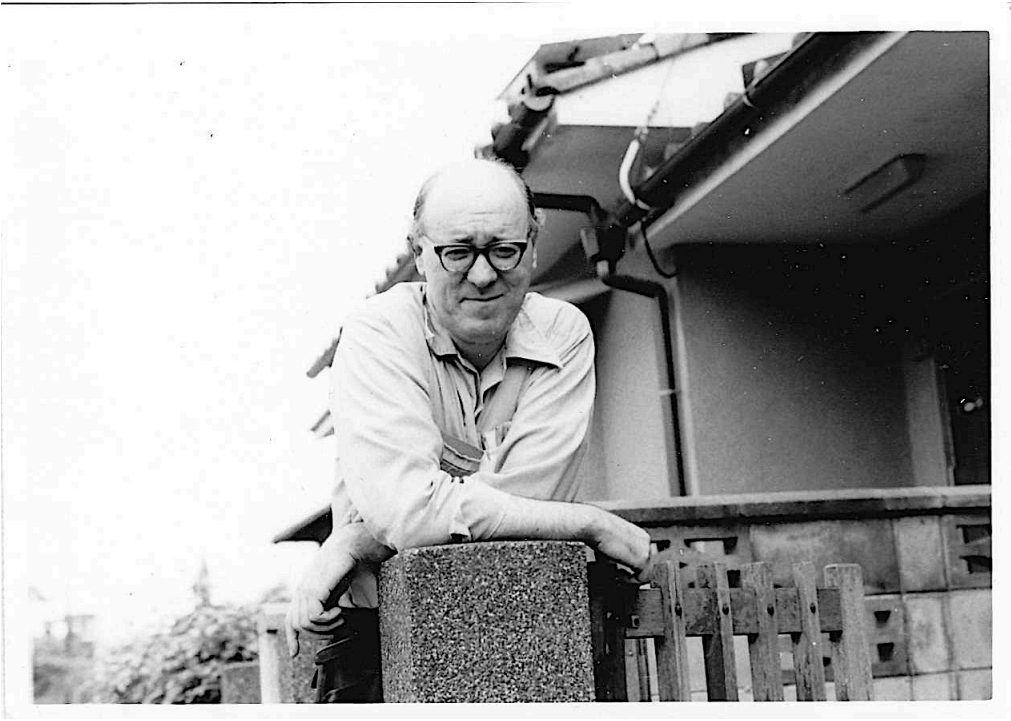


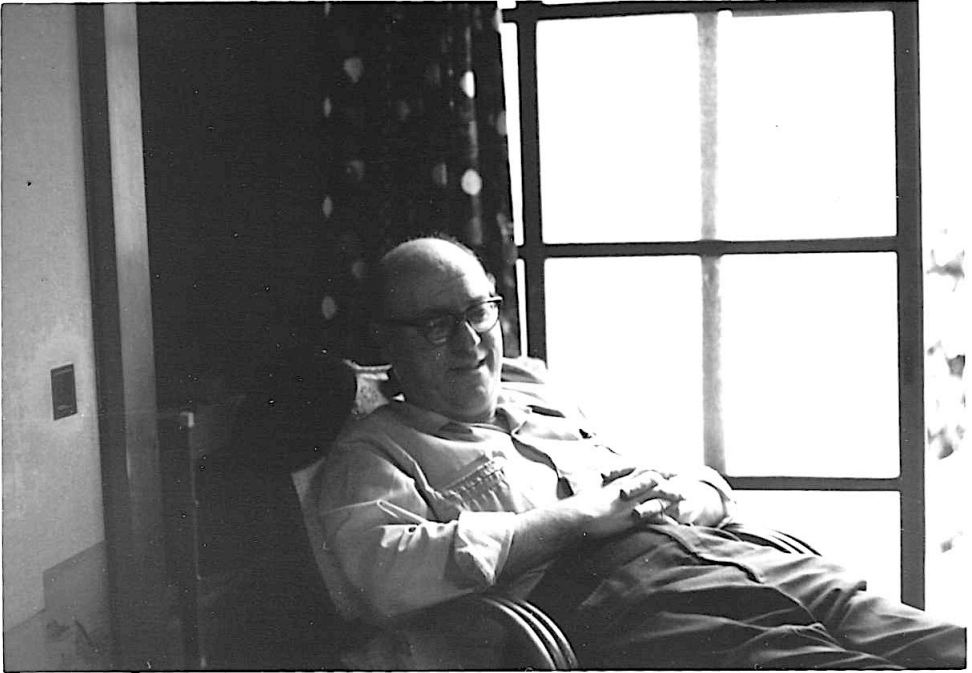






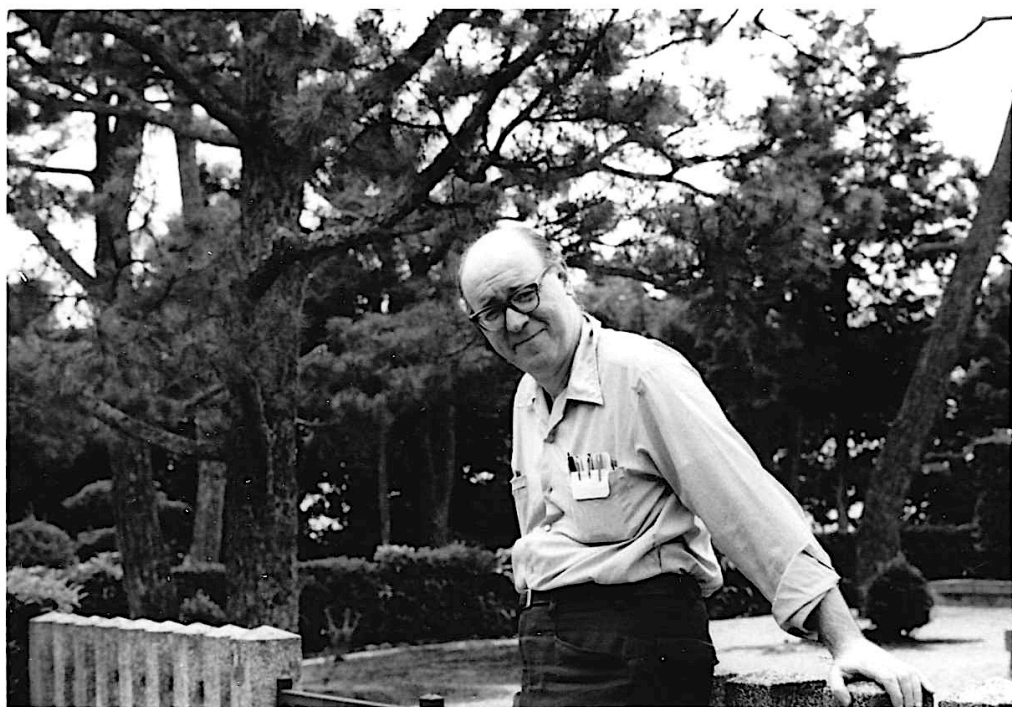












Two Masters: two old soldiers of the line. Delve, Reader, discover diverse ways; look away wiser, briefed, having had joy of the temper, the craft, and art, as relayed by two now also aging masters in Two Masters' wake.

— Guy Burchard

All poets have their masters: those who pass on through their words the knowledge gained from a life lived simply in poetry to others who may in turn become masters themselves. This circle continues since poetry is an act of sharing, an act of generosity. This generosity, to each and every particular, no matter how small (and the small mattering most) is one of the qualities Robert Lee and Gid Cormin held — & still hold — most in common. Within the pages of this book, two master poets — creators of some of the quietest poetry ever — are equally honoured, word to word, in a beautifully generous act of remembrance by their friends, John Lezy and David Miller. These two texts (Lezy's a journal, Miller's a reminiscence quoting letters) contain many joys and symmetries, including the greater part of each being offered to us in the older poets' own words. As if we were listening in on their shared speech, overhearing their conversations. Thus the generosity, which is poetry, continues.

— John Phillips

The wonderful Two Masters reads — completely — like three cooks in the kitchen!

— Bob Arnold

